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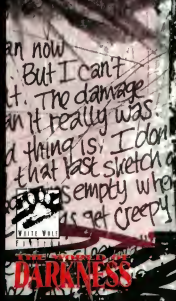
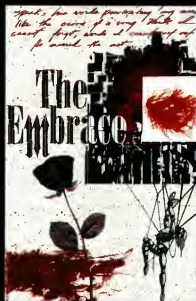
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ABOVE: A detail from Don Maitz's cover painting for the book *Silverthorn*, by Raymond E. Feist. Enjoy more of Maitz's paintings in our Gallery on page 58.

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# REALMS OF FANTASY

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There's no power on earth that can keep a mother from her child. But can a mother fight forces from under the sea?

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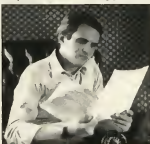
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P6289

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Dear Ms. McCarthy,  
I wanted to tell you how wonderful it is to finally have a quality magazine devoted entirely to the subject of fantasy. As a fantasy writer and illustrator, I have long hungered for a mentally and visually stimulating publication devoted to fantasy literature and art.

I applaud your vision on the definition of fantasy, as revealed in your editorial in issue one, and as evidenced by your choice of authors, stories, and illustrators in the first three issues. I have read them from cover to cover and enjoyed one and all.

I feel fantasy illustration and fantasy literature share a symbiotic relationship, and that being the case, both should be given coverage. You evidently share this opinion as evidenced by your outstanding cover art and interior illustrations, as well as the Gallery section. In fact, I purchased the first issue simply because I am a Michael Whelan fan.

The Gallery column is especially appealing to me as an artist. The Dream Weavers article and J.K. Potter piece were wonderful. Please continue to include the Gallery. I would love to see interviews and works of other fantasy artists in every issue. A glimpse into their techniques would be interesting too. I realize this is not an artist's magazine, but such articles are far too rare in the mainstream art magazines, which often seem to view fantasy art as unworthy of their notice.

I need not wish you luck or success, as your work and that of your contributors needs no luck to succeed. I will instead simply say... thank you.

Live long and publish,

Shonn F. Everett League City, TX

P.S. I am glad you are on the internet. Though I don't expect a real reply, a simple click on your reply button to let me know you received my letter would be appreciated.

Sorry, Shonn. I don't have a "reply" button. I wouldn't even know where to look for one. Maybe it's because I'm not really on the Internet, but can only receive Internet E-mail. Anyway, thanks very much for the kind words—I'm glad you're enjoying the magazine.

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

Greetings! I would like to point out something that I see happening in *Realms of Fantasy* Magazine. When I look through the author/artist sections of your magazines I often notice that most of the people who write stories or do art for *Realms of Fantasy* are very well-known or previously published people. I realize that it is nice to have a lot of famous people in your magazine but this does not always give unpublished authors such a good chance; it does not help when you are fifteen years old either. I agree that a story by a well-known author would

be nice but I really think that you should accept a lot more unpublished authors' material (and youths') and a lot of new artists as well. (By the way I recently sent in a manuscript for a short story of mine.)

Most sincerely,  
David Dancer  
Rochester, MN

*Well, David, it truly doesn't matter if you're fifteen or a hundred and fifteen. What matters is how good the story is. You'll notice that in Issue Three, the stories by Noreen Doyle and Judith Berman were both first sales from previously unpublished writers.*

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I am a student of Computer Engineering Technology at the Rochester Institute of Technology and I subscribe to both *Science Fiction Age* and *Realms of Fantasy* magazines. I used to be a strict reader of science fiction only but as soon as I received the first issue of your magazine, I began to appreciate the fantasy genre a little more.

*Realms of Fantasy* caused me to realize that science fiction tends to concentrate more on science than it does on plot. Thanks to you, I can now enjoy what storytelling was meant to be.

Keep up the good work.

Wesley Lowe  
Rochester, New York

*I'm pleased that we were able to expand your horizons a bit, but please don't discount science fiction—both genres can pack a real wallop. It's not the label that counts—it's what you find in the package, and there's wonderful stuff to be found everywhere—even outside the traditional genre limits.*

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I've been reading science fiction and fantasy short stories for years, but until now I haven't come across a magazine with such beautifully crafted stories. The February 1995 issue is simply fantastic, and I especially loved "The Last Waltz" and "The Moon is Drowning While I Sleep." These are two of the better balanced stories I've read in a long time. Their crafting as they lead into and capture their respective climaxes is spell-binding, leaving me wanting more! I sincerely hope that future issues will contain more stories by Charles de Lint and Richard Parks.

Great work!  
Francis H. Kittredge

*Your letters and comments are welcomed. Make sure you mark them as letters or they're likely to get mixed in with writer's guidelines requests. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760.*

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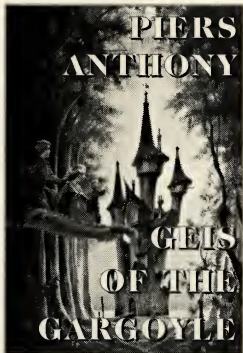
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By JEANNE CAVELOs

## Playing with things that go bump in the night.

FOR THIS GUEST EDITORIAL I'D LIKE TO SHARE A THEORY I HAVE ON FANTASY'S DARK SIDE—supernatural horror. A few months ago, I moved from New York City, where I'd been an editor at Dell Publishing, to New Hampshire, where I'm a freelance editor and college professor. A strange thing happened after I'd spent a few days in the little house in the woods where I now live. I started imagining *Evil Dead* entities rushing through the woods toward me, imagining bogeymen outside coming to get me. These are thoughts I hadn't had for years. Mind you, in New York City I was scared of someone coming to get me, but it wasn't the bogeyman; it was the guy who'd broken into the apartment downstairs and tied up the two women living there while he spent all night going through their costume jewelry piece by piece. But I didn't spend much energy worrying about supernatural entities. Now it's not necessary that you worry about these things in order to enjoy horror. In New York I edited and enjoyed many horror novels. But in New Hampshire I felt my imagination opening, exploring the dark side of the fantasy spectrum with a terrific thrill. In fact, I spent most of my first night in this house awake, cowering under the blankets, certain that something was trying to get in.

As the founder of the Abyss horror line of books, I've often been asked if I think the downturn in horror book sales over the past seven years signals that horror is dead. I've heard many people say that our world today contains such horrors in it that it's impossible to imagine anything scarier than reality. Well, I don't buy that. I don't know about you, but in the middle of the night I can imagine some pretty hair-raising stuff.

I believe that reading horror is, in one sense, a type of

play. The thrill of hide-and-seek with the stakes raised. The thrill of tickling your friend until she screams, or being tickled until you scream. But if you play hide-and-seek for a living (say between the subway and your apartment), it isn't much fun to play it in your free time. And if your skin is constantly crawling with sensations, tickling won't do much for you. It's not that reality is more frightening than anything we can imagine, but that reality constantly elicits minor fears that limit and control the way we think. To escape from their fear, people want to feel the opposite, to feel safe and secure. While as a child I went to dusk-to-dawn horrorthon drive-ins with my mom (free packet of green blood with admission), today's kids want *Barney* or *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. Where once *The Omen* and *Rosemary's Baby* had us enthralled by the devil, people today only want to read about angels. Even the holiday of Halloween has been overshadowed by fear. Kids up here go trick-or-treating in the *afternoon*, in broad daylight, with all their treats checked for tampering. Many people are afraid of so many things, they don't want to play anymore. Imagining that slaving, soul-sucking monster in the closet just isn't the fun it used to be.

And so our imaginations can become constricted, limited. We live so much among people, in a world shaped and regulated by people, it's hard to imagine any non-human force having a significant impact. Up here in the woods, if I look at some trees and imagine what's behind them, I'm free to imagine an eight-tentacled green vampire-creature. Back in the city, if I look down an alley and imagine what's hiding there, I'm going to have to work through a lot of more realistic possibilities—a mugger, a rapist, a psycho—before I can get to the good stuff.

So back to New Hampshire. People are still killed, robbed, stabbed every day. But I'm just not too worried about any of these things happening to me (these people leave their doors *unlocked*). I'm more open to the idea of playing with things that go bump in the night, more hungry for eerie, terrifying experiences.

Does that mean supernatural horror is doomed? No. Many of us are intrepid souls who will seek out the horrors no matter what real life fears we live with. But I think our numbers will grow, and we will all be freer to play, to revel in the dark, when we find some respite in the real world. ♦

Imagine looking down an alley and seeing—not a common mugger but—Count Orlok, the chilling vampire from the 1922 horror classic *Nosferatu*. A Symphony of Terror.





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## Gifted storytellers give us A Plague of Angels and Bride of the Rat God.

WHEN I WAS A SNOTTY KID back in the '40s—and snotty I most certainly was!—one of the things I liked best about science fiction was the great edge it used to give you on the grownups.

Back then science fiction was still very much under the influence of Hugo (Yes, Virginia, there really *was* a Hugo.) Gernsback, a cheapo magazine entrepreneur who, encouraged by the reader reaction to the technical fantastic he'd allowed to sneak into his otherwise reportorial magazine *Science and Invention*, brought out

*Amazing Stories*, the first publication ever to be devoted entirely to science fiction, or, as Gernsback called it, "scientification" (and aren't we all glad that appellation didn't catch on?).

Mr. Gernsback was very much a nuts-and-bolts rather than a literary man, and the stories he leaned toward printing favored moving staircases and doors which opened miraculously via electric eyes rather than those relying on plots and characters. Also—outside of an occasional scientist shouting "Eureka!"—there was no discernible trace of human emotion in any single one of them.

By the time I'd arrived at my full snotty-kidness and joined science fiction readerdom, Gernsback had long faded back into being the dim, historical creature which he still is, and the great high priest and father figure in the field was John W. Campbell, Jr., the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*.

Campbell was Totally Gernsbackian in his devotion to and pride in the "hard science" which was featured in

*Astounding's* tales, and he would publicly scoff and snort at the softies who whined about "motivation" and "character" and the almost complete absence of sex. The thing that Campbell and his readers wanted and, by God, got, was some new angle on how to fly to Mars, or yet another surprising notion on time travel, or an even cleverer method of multidimensional wandering—basically any conceivable escape from the mundane here and now via high technology.

In my experience the apogee of all this arrived for snotty-kidom at the finish of World War II. Science was booming in all sorts of dazzling and horrendous ways and, though they tried to hide it, our grownups were frightened and confused by all of this, and it showed.

They all perceived dimly that great and incomprehensible events were insidiously developing, but—being grownups—they were far too preoccupied with things like making a living and worrying about getting sick and dying to find the time required to master any of the fine points of the present wonders occurring all around them—the atomic bombs, Hitler's rockets, radar—they were, in fact, astonishingly lacking in even the dimmest and faintest faulty glimmerings about the most elementary basics concerning the dazzling new miracles which were to burgeon in their very near future.

Meanwhile we snotty kids had the time, the leisure, the singleness of focus, and the spongy appetite of youth to soak up all the details of those radical new things, and our secret source, science fiction pulps, helped to put us on the inside track. I think we even managed to grow a little blasé; in fact, I'm sure we did.

I shall never forget the magical moment when, after some Thanksgiving or Christmas family dinner, I held stage center in the living room of one or another of my aunt's and uncle's as the adults, stuffed and bleary and perhaps more than a trifle boozy, gazed down at me in growing astonishment as I prattled on about things from my beloved pulps which they *never even knew existed*.

Their eyes grew wider and wider as they heard for the very first time about the necessity of reaching orbital velocity before achieving escape velocity. Their jaws dropped as they listened to me prattle about the huge numbers of those velocities. Their mouths pursed painfully and they winced at my graphic descriptions of the effects those great velocities would have on the

*A Plague of Angels examines the age-old battle between technology and religion, nature and progress. Cover art by Mark Harrison.*



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human flesh and frame. It was a moment of total triumph over my elders which I shall never forget, one which gave me a needed shot of confidence for further growing, and I will always be grateful to science fiction for giving it to me.

But slowly we have moved into different times, into the very times predicted by those pulps of long ago, in fact. Science fiction found itself wandering into science fiction times, a mere redundancy, an almost feeble echo of the world about itself. We are now surrounded by, and entirely dependent on, the very wonders John W. Campbell, Jr. breathlessly predicted would someday be upon us.

The big surprise seems to be that those wonders have by no means solved all our problems as Hugo Gernsback and John Q. Campbell, Jr. fondly believed they would. The upbeat future rather glibly predicted by the increasingly quaint-looking science fiction produced for the now increasingly brown and brittle pages of those ancient pulp magazines has decidedly failed to arrive, or at least not yet. What we seem to have instead is much more like the future which was predicted a little later by grownup, hard-cover science fiction books such as 1984 and Brave New World. For the nonce, at least, we have arrived in what is unmistakably a dystopia.

One result of all this has been a gradual but sweeping alteration of the nature of the writ-



*Abasio and the girl named Orphan join in a shared destiny that will change their world forever.*

ing still catalogued under the increasingly inappropriate label of science fiction. It began its transformation by moving in interesting steps from the original, upbeat "give me a good rocket ship and I'll give you a shining future" mood of those old bright-eyed and optimistic stories of yore, to an increasingly angry though often interesting period of deepening gloom, and finally to its philosophical opposite as SF writers almost uni-

versally proclaimed that technology was a cruel hoax, a blind alley which had led us into a dismal, pointless, suicidal world society in which absolutely everything and everybody sucks.

It remained stuck in that dark place for a long time, and a good deal of it is still there; but an increasing number of writers finally decided to leave off repeated and, finally, boring visits to that future's dead-end atmosphere and its stifling petulance and to explore—I think to great effect—the original sweeping and profound mythic impulses which have always underlaid the field and been its basic source of power.

Sheri S. Tepper is one of the best of these new explorers, and *A Plague of Angels* (Bantam Books, NY, 559 pp., Paperback, \$5.99) is one of her best explorations. Like many other books of this kind, *Plague* decidedly does continue the highly pessimistic slant of post pulp science fiction—the basis of her fable is that technology is highly dangerous stuff if misused, and she portrays a society which has misused it very badly, indeed—but, Tepper does not let the near total destruction of humanity's sustaining environment get her down.

The novel rolls right along from the start as Tepper is a natural born storyteller. We find ourselves immediately interested in the journey of a strapping young farm boy named Abasio Cermit (Tepper has a fine ear for odd names) who is determined to journey forth

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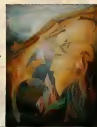
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from his bucolic little hamlet and view the greater world just as his mysterious mother did before him.

After ducking an encounter with two sinister wanderers full of interesting, clue-filled conversation, and being hugged fondly and portentously by a tiny orphan girl who is being toted off in a basket to live in an archetypal village, Abasio gets a lift from a goblin-plagued truck driver named Golly, and we are happily plunged into a world which skillfully mixes the rules and images of the technological and societal speculations of science fiction with the high morality and fantastic evocations of Tolkienesque world building.

Far too many authors lacking the requisite abilities try this sort of thing and make an ill-digested hash of it (a truly repulsive image which I've decided to let stand), but Tepper knows just what she's doing and never loses her balance. Each of the different parts of her world make sense and so do their interrelationships and their shared history. Also she has an excellent knack for developing convincingly living characters and—very importantly—she is kindly and of good heart in her dealings with them. Her people and creatures are all at least a little fantastic, but they are all tenderly drawn and I found myself both interested in and touched by them all from the very first meeting.

There is an excellent villain, a thoroughly evil witch, Quince Ellet, the Ellet of the Ellet

clan, daughter of the thoroughly nasty and probably dead—though we are not really sure—Jack Ellet III. Her darlings are a horde of ancient beetle-black robots called Walkers who constantly prowl the land, terrifyingly interrogating all they encounter as they search for a lost child. If they stand still for any length of time, the grass turns brown and foul-smelling under their feet.

There are many heroes, young and old, brave and not so brave, human and otherwise. The aforementioned Abasio is one, though he goes through a long, looping side route on the way to getting there; Orphan is decidedly another; old Seocca, the last of the Gaddis, who dwells in the golden Gaddi House with its mysterious subbasements and its living thrones is another, and one of my favorites is a talking coyote—though I confess to being a complete pushover when it comes to coyotes—who Tepper brings alive quite marvelously.

There are palaces, weird wastes, towns—including one long since taken over by bumbling thugs dying of gang war and venereal disease—and a number of countries, including Artemisia, which has named itself after a sage plant in order to indicate that it is a home of the wise.

The story is very rich with lots of surprises and highly interesting developments; there is a doomishness afoot, but there is also a lot of bravery and, therefore, hope. I have shied away from plot specifics on purpose as I

would hate to damage the multitude of unfoldments, but I am happy to make the general admission that I found myself quite moved by how things turned out. I suspect you will be, too, and that you will also very much enjoy this book.

**Bride of the Rat God**, by Barbara Hambly, Del Rey Books, NY, 336 pp., paperback, \$5.99.

*Bride of the Rat God* is a much less ambitious work, written by another natural born storyteller, Barbara Hambly, and it's obvious that she had a great deal of fun doing it. Also it's clearly a project very dear to her heart for it is dedicated with all her love to Whiskey, Smudge, Nicholas, and the eternally beautiful Kismet, who are Ms. Hambly's beloved pack of Pekingese (she seems to be as gaga about them as I am about Cairn Terriers) and—it doesn't take the alert reader long to figure out—the inspiration for what I am sure are a bunch of remarkably similar and highly important Peke characters in the book, named Chang Ming, Black Jasmine and Buttercream.

*Bride* is set in Los Angeles in the '20s, and is about the glory days of silent films. And, again, it's quite clear that Hambly had a fine time gathering up all sorts of obscure information about that era, place, and industry and weaving as much as possible into this highly entertaining fantasy/mystery story. Various locations which have changed completely or are totally long gone pop up and

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play important parts, such as Ocean Park before the Pickering/Lick Pier burned down, or Venice back in the days when it really was a whacky, Mickey Mouse version of the weird old Italian town, sewagey canals and all.

The movie business as it was in the 1920s is nicely and authentically evoked by Hamblly and never slows down the movement of the plot. How the problems presented by the photographic technology of that bygone era were solved are shown, for example, by having Alec Mindelbaum—a cameraman and one of the intrepid heroes—take care of them as they come up in the course of the action. The charming oddities of how movie scenes were actually filmed back in those halcyon days is interestingly demonstrated as famed director Mikos Hraidy frantically guides the shooting of *She-Devil of Babylon*, sometimes in the studio and sometimes on remote and highly uncomfortable locations, but always with a living, breathing and long-suffering trio of musicians present to play their hearts out in order to provide inspiration for the actors and crew.

The plot of the book is perhaps even more unabashed than that of the movie being filmed within it: Colossus Studios' production of a C.B. DeMillish biblical epic runs into increasing difficulties when Keith Pelletier, the stuntman lover of one of its stars, the legendary Charles Sandringham, is found chopped into gory bits in Sandringham's home; and its female lead, the beautiful and glamorous Chrysandra Flamaude (known by the somewhat more manageable appellation "Christine" off the set) finds herself the target of a series of increasingly spooky attacks which are, perhaps, connected with her ill-advised wearing of a sinister jewel known as the "Moon of Rats" during the filming of her last released flick, *Kiss of Darkness*.

Will the underhanded ministrations of Colossus' hulking owner, A.E. "Frank" Brown, and his public relations manager, Conrad Fishbein, be sufficient to save the day? Will the occult consultations of Nadi Neferu-Aten, counselor of the Sabsung Institute for the Well-Being of Souls, and her Grecian-draped attendant Graces, Peony and Kama Shakti, be useful, or will they be a total waste of everybody's time?

There are any number of solid little subplots contributing to the major flow. I found myself very interested in the story of Nora Blackstone, who has been rescued from dreary slavery under a grimly disapproving aunt in England's darkest Manchester by her spectacular movie star sister-in-law, Christine, and whirled into the middle of Hollywood's glamour so that she might at last have the freedom to blossom and perhaps to find her way to love once more. I was also extremely taken with the adventures of Shang Ko, the ancient Chinese magician, known in his native land and in this country's Chinatowns as the Shining Crane, who was badly injured, both within and without, by a prior encounter with the evil demon Da



Shu Ken, otherwise known as the Rat God, and who is not altogether delighted to find himself once again pitted against his ancient, wickedly clever enemy.

And, of course, we must not forget the aforementioned three characters who, I am sure consider themselves, perhaps correctly, the stars of the book, namely Chang Ming, Black Jasmine and Buttercream. Are these heroic Pekingese truly the potent-looking fu dogs we see in statue form guarding the doorways of Chinese temples as Ms. Hamby guesses they might be? After reading *Bride of the Rat God* I have found myself completely and permanently convinced that they may well be, and I shall make it a point to give any Peke I encounter a tiny kowtow of the head henceforth. There is, when you think of it, a great deal in common between those tough little lions and Cairn terriers, after all.

Gahan Wilson

*Exiles: Volume I—The Ruins of Ambrai*, by Melanie Rawn (DAW Books, NY, 678 pp., Hardcover, \$20.95)

Every author wants her first book to be a success, to be purchased and appreciated by hundreds—nay, thousands—of readers. Yet such success creates a new challenge: To write another successful book. To show that the first book was more than a flash in the pan. To overcome the dreaded "sophomore slump." To prove that one is a good author, and not only the writer of a single good story.

In the case of Melanie Rawn, the challenge was somewhat different, and much greater. She had already written six successful books, in two trilogies—the *Dragon Prince* and *Dragon Star* series—which told a continuing saga of generations, magic, and dragons. Melanie Rawn's challenge was to write a new tale, and not just a new book. Could she create new characters which would still captivate her readers? Could she display the same skills in telling their stories? Could she—and would she—leave behind the world of Goddess Keep and the Desert and invent a new planet of wonder, delight, and magic?

She could—and she did. *The Ruins of Ambrai* is the first installment in a new trilogy which will surely captivate her fans and attract new readers. There are no dragons this time, but there is magic aplenty and a rich, complex narrative which easily matches her earlier books.

Ambrai is a powerful city on the planet of Lenfell, where magic is wielded by the Mageborns. The two rival Mageborn factions—the Mage Guardians and the Lords of Malerris—had once fought each other in a terrible war, which devastated both the environment and the genetic pool of Lenfell's inhabitants. They renew their deadly rivalry in *The Ruins of Ambrai*, bringing new levels of destruction to Ambrai, Lenfell, the people, and themselves.

*The Ruins of Ambrai* is also the tale of three sisters of the Ambrai family, which is torn

apart by the separation of their parents. Glenin, the eldest, leaves Ambrai with her father and learns the Malerrisi secrets and goals. Sarra remains with her mother and goes on to play an increasingly important role in the resistance movement known as "the Rising." Caillet is the youngest, unknown to many and with magical powers—and responsibilities—which not even she completely comprehends. Their lives and actions affect the future of the entire planet and set the stage for the rest of the trilogy.

This is a long work (over 600 pages), filled with rich details concerning Lenfell's caste-like, matriarchal society and its people. The narrative jumps and enormous cast of characters will force readers to pay close attention, as important facts are mentioned in passing and new developments suddenly occur. Readers who develop quick attachments to all major characters should be forewarned that a number of them will not be alive at the end. However, even death is not necessarily what we might first assume on the planet of Lenfell, and the Wraiths do have their own roles to play in this tale. Rawn also drops in a few items which may play greater roles in the coming volumes, including the specter of the hideous Wraithbeasts and the slightest indication that human beings might exist on other planets.

In her earlier books, Melanie Rawn displayed great sensitivity and understanding of her characters. In *The Ruins of Ambrai*, she

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maintains this skill by helping us to understand why Glenin, Sarra, Caillet, and others are the way they are. She also reminds us that even in great epics such as this—life is complicated, decisions are uncertain, and individuals must constantly question themselves and each other about their actions, feelings, and motives. This element enriches the *Exiles* trilogy, giving us a tale of fantasy which is all too human.

When I finish the first book in a new series, I ask two questions: (1) How impatient am I to read the next installment? (2) Will I enjoy re-reading the first book? *The Ruins of Ambrai* scores very, very well in both regards. I am mad (petulant, in fact!) that I can't immediately read book number two in the *Exiles* trilogy. At the same time, I look forward to reading it again in the future, knowing that I will find new pleasures in its narrative, people, and world. Melanie Rawn has established beyond doubt that she is a great writer of fantasy, and *The Ruins of Ambrai* will join the *Dragon* series in my library of favorites for years to come.

Dan Silver

*Ships of Merior*, by Janny Wurts (Harper-Prism, 917 pp., Hardcover \$23.00)

Already an established World Fantasy Award-winning artist, Janny Wurts has another flourishing career as a writer. She has published five novels on her own (including the *Cycle of Fire* trilogy) and the *Empire* series

in collaboration with Raymond E. Feist.

The first two books of her five-book epic called *The Wars of Light and Shadow*, are very obviously the work of an artist (who even paints her own book covers!). Janny Wurts paints with her words, drawing the reader headlong into an adventure in the *Curse of the Mistwaith*, when her world of Athera is smothered in fog and despair. It is foretold that the descendant of the High Kings will dispel the mist. However, the power to conquer the mist is divided between two feuding half-brother princes, neither able to defeat the Mistwaith without cooperation from the other. Lysaer is the Lord of Light, handsome, charismatic, and committed to justice, with an obsession for peace, even at the cost of many lives. Arithon is the strong, sensitive, musical bastard son of a pirate king. *Ships of Merior* focuses on him. Arithon is hurled into impossible choices (like having to use the dark arts against his brother), and battles with his conscience, the seas, and the hard job of just staying alive.

This is an epic clothed in the language and settings of a fantasy adventure tale. The author sets out not to glorify or stylize war. There are no right reasons to kill. She develops characters who aren't black and white, but every shade of color. The reader can step into Arithon's shoes, live his life through his eyes, and finish the journey with him as a changed person. We look forward to the next three books of this epic.

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## Books To Look For

**A King Beneath the Mountain**, by Robert N. Charrette, Warner Books, April 1995. The best-selling author of *Never Deal with a Dragon* continues his latest fantasy adventure series. Now Quetzal, the serpent god of Aztec legend, has arrived in the twenty-first century and is using his powers to subdue the world. The future rests with Reddy and King Arthur (who was awakened in *A Prince Among Men*, the first book in this trilogy).

**Fire in the Sky** by Jo Clayton, DAW, May 1995. After centuries as a slave trapped in the Diadem, Shadith is now a free woman with a magical special gift: the ability to communicate with alien species.

**Von Bek**, by Michael Moorcock, White Wolf, Inc. Captain von Bek is a soldier-of-fortune who has made a deal with Lucifer. In order to regain his soul he must obtain the Holy Grail. The von Bek family remains agents of the devil and protectors of the Grail throughout history until the rise of the Nazis.

**The Moon and the Thorn**, by Teresa Edgerton, Ace, April 1995. This is the conclusion to the magical *Celydwen* trilogy. Gwennliant possesses Wild Magic (the

ability to change shapes and control the elements). Her quest to save her son from an old enemy may cost her her powers and her life.

**Exiles' Return**, by Gayle Greeno, DAW, May 1995. Book Three of *The Ghatti's Tale* takes Seeker Jenret on a mission to find the Resonants (men and women gifted with the ability to read and control the minds of others) and bring them to safety.

**The Secret Prophecies of Nostradamus**, edited by Cynthia Sternau and Martin Greenberg, DAW, March 1995. Nostradamus's prophecies have puzzled and fascinated each new generation that discovers them. Some of the finest visionaries use these prophecies to play games with time and space, arriving at some truly unique and imaginative interpretations that the master himself could never have predicted.

**Mind of the Magic**, by Holly Lisle, Baen Books. Faia Rissedotte is a powerful mage who doesn't follow the rules. She has upset a system of magic hundreds of years old, and now the gods and fates are after her. Fantasy adventure fans will enjoy her strong female character and the way she battles with her adversaries.

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BY MICHAEL CASSUTT

# In the TV war between robots and unicorns, the unicorns have always lost.

SCIENCE FICTION IS ALL OVER TELEVISION THESE DAYS: *X-FILES*, *EARTH 2*, *BABYLON 5*, *TIME Trax*, *Highlander*, *Robocop*, *TekWar*, not to mention what seems like several dozen *Star Trek* series. There's even a Sci-Fi Channel. But what about fantasy? Where are the long-running fantasy series? How come your cable service doesn't have a fantasy channel? It seems that as far as television goes, there has been a war between robots and unicorns, and the unicorns have lost.

This is striking for two reasons. First, fantasy films have a long and honored tradition—*The Wizard of Oz*, *The Thief of Baghdad*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Splash*, *Big*, *Hook*. Some of these succeed, some don't; but you could make a list as long as you like.

A glance at a trade paper like *Daily Variety* or *The Hollywood Reporter* shows the continuing strength of the genre in films. In the next few months we'll have a chance to see *Jumanji*, from the Chris van Allsburg book, which will star Robin Williams; and *The Indian in the Cupboard* (Paramount), directed by Frank Oz. Other upcoming fantasy projects include *First Knight* (Columbia), a new version of the Arthur saga, starring Sean Connery; *Mary Reilly* (Tri-Star), directed by Stephen Fears and starring Julia Roberts and John Malkovich, in an adaptation of Valerie Martin's novel about Dr. Jekyll's housekeeper; and from Buena Vista animation, Tim Burton's *Jenny and the Giant Peach*. (Isn't every animated film a fantasy?)

Naturally there are also the usual fantasy-horror films, with budgets large and small.

As for fantasy series in development for television... Alan Brennert (*Twilight Zone*, *L.A. Law*) is writing an anthology show called *Love Is Strange* for Fox as a late-night candidate. In primetime Fox is developing *The Kindred*, based on the White Wolf book series about vam-

pires. Aaron Spelling is the executive producer. CBS has a pair of superhero series in the works, one from the team of Sam Raimi and Howard Chaykin, the other from... well, me. David Kemper (sonQuest!) is writing a script for ABC about a woman with E.S.P.

There are others, of course. In television series development, each of the four "full-service" networks will commission at least two fantasy pilot scripts among the thirty to forty dramas (and an even greater number of comedies) purchased each season. The two new networks—United Paramount and Warner—can probably be counted on for another three or four between them. The syndicated and cable market will have a similar number of pilot scripts.

This adds up to perhaps a dozen fantasy concepts being given consideration in this season—and the only one of these that is guaranteed to find its way to your home screen is Spelling's show.

But I wonder if it doesn't also reflect some inherent problem with the genre. I've worked in television, on both sides of the desk, for something like twelve years, and I know from sad experience that a presentation that begins, "This is a fantasy..." still causes the buyers to get a look on their faces which is both challenging and dismissive. The mention of "science fiction" used to get the same face, but *Star Trek* has managed to change that. Development executives now have a pretty good idea of what kind of audience a science fiction series will find. They also understand what science fiction is.

Science fiction, in television and film, is fantasy that *could happen*. Look at the premises: a semi-dead police officer is merged with a machine and becomes a robot crime fighter. Possible. Aliens landed on Earth years ago, only the government doesn't want us to know. Not only possible, but accepted as fact by some people. In the future, giant space cities—maybe four or five of them—will be built in the galactic rift and will naturally attract the scum of the galaxy. Possible, if not necessarily likely. You get the idea.

Fantasy is trickier. One school holds that *everything* you see on television—including so-called news and reality—is fantasy of one sort or another. Who ever lived like the Ewings on *Dallas*? Didn't the passengers on the *Minnow* have an awful lot of luggage for a three-hour tour? But this sounds like the old argument that all fiction is

Upcoming fantasy genre films include *First Knight*, Columbia's new version of the Arthur saga, starring Richard Gere and Sean Connery.





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In last season's "Hercules and the Amazon Women," Kevin Sorbo is taken captive as he attempts to save a village besieged by unseen monsters. MCA's TV movie series is filmed in New Zealand.

fantasy, at which point the words have lost useful meaning.

Fantasy, for the purposes of production companies and networks, is a story that can't happen. There is no resort run by Mr. Roark—alas. You don't have a cute witch living across the street. You cannot—trust me on this—create a super-model playmate out of an old video game, a discarded Barbie, and a thunderstorm. Fantasy means magic. It means beings other than human. It takes place in worlds that can't exist or never existed. It is often a fragile thing—stories that come from the heart and the deep, dark unconscious. From your dreams and nightmares. We all know what happens when we try to capture a dream.

So fantasy by its nature is troubling. This is partly due to fantasy's checkered history on television: *Topper*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Beauwitched*, *Weird Science*, even a show I worked on called *Eerie, Indiana* (if I had been paid each time I was asked to explain just why this little town was so strange...). When most people think of fantasy on television, the image of Gladys Kravitz sneaking around Samantha's kitchen comes to mind.

Fantasy concepts have been used for silliness. What about a fantasy-drama? Well, the only one that comes to mind is *Fantasy Island*. The prosecution rests.

This is an unfair generalization. Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone* was a fantasy series—more fantasy than science fiction, certainly—and still ranks as some of the finest television ever made. There have been any number of acclaimed series and specials produced for children, ranging from *Dungeons and Dragons* to the more recent *Batman* and *Gargoyles*.

Even now, surfing through your seventy channels, you will find the occasional TV movie, such as HBO's recent and amusing *Witch Hunt*, starring Dennis Hopper and written by Joseph Daugherty (thirtysomething). *Witch Hunt* is a sequel to the earlier *Cast a*

*Deadly Spell*, and takes place in a past Los Angeles in which magic really works. MCA's series of TV movies—the Action Pak—has produced four *Hercules* adventures.

So television isn't quite a fantasy desert. But if you look for Tolkien-esque fantasies or sword and sorcery, you'll be looking for a long time. Where is a setting like the wooded forests of *Willow*? Where, for that matter, are the deserts of *Conan*? Where are the creatures of *The Dark Crystal*?

They're in feature films because of time and money—the two commodities hardest to come by in television. Here are some unpleasant facts: an animated feature like *Aladdin* spent three years in production. *Interview with the Vampire* was in development for fifteen years. You can't do a live-action fantasy feature film for less than \$30 million.

A television series, on the other hand, can't really be sold as a concept before July of any given development season. The script will be delivered around Thanksgiving...and a decision made to film it (or not) will be made at New Year's. It must then be prepped, cast, filmed, edited, dubbed, and scored before mid-May, when everyone takes a few weeks off, and then the process starts again.

This lack of time alone is what kills serious fantasy on television. There's almost no point in talking about money when you realize that the economics of television dictate that twenty-two episodes must be produced for less than the cost of a two-hour feature film.

Where are you going to get Hobbitts for a television budget and schedule? You can't design, test, and build masks and costumes, not to mention appliances and special effects, in a few days—not if you want them to look good. Medieval settings? Where are you supposed to shoot them? It's almost impossible to find them in Southern California, and not much easier in Vancouver, British Columbia, which is fast becoming Hollywood-North. To get a true wilderness you'd have to shoot

in some place like New Zealand, the way Action Pak's *Hercules* did. Fine for a movie, but not for the production of twenty-two hours over eight months. Until it's all computerized, film and television production requires a cast and crew of living human beings, who would have to be housed in some godforsaken wilderness for the entire time, which is a recipe for broken marriages and cost overruns. It's difficult enough to make a television series without those problems.

But there may be good news in store. Science fiction series have forced their way onto schedules and stayed there thanks to *Star Trek*—but *Star Trek* probably wouldn't have been revived without two developments. The first was the development of higher-quality special effects which can be completed quickly. (They aren't necessarily cheaper than the effects of a generation ago; their virtue is that they exist at all.) Thanks to computer-generated images, it's going to be possible to place real actors into the most fantastic settings imaginable and still allow them to sleep at home every night.

The second, and more critical, development was the creation of several new markets besides the three major networks. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was developed by its owner, Paramount Studios, for first-run syndication even as CBS was clamoring for its return. (In first-run syndication, series are sold by a company directly to stations or station groups. The original studio then makes whatever money there is to make, instead of getting a network "license fee.") ST:TNG was so successful that many of the current series named in the first paragraph are in first-run syndication. If a writer-producer can find a production company that believes in a fantasy project, it's already two-thirds of the way to the audience, because an alternative exists to the networks.

(In fact, first-run syndicated series have a higher survival rate than new network dramas for another reason: they're on every week. New network shows are vulnerable to constant preemption, for *Circus of the Stars* or miniseries. If a syndicated series is scheduled to air every Wednesday night at eight, by God it will be there, twenty-two Wednesday nights in a row.)

The fragmentation of the television audience also means that series are considered to be successful with a much smaller number of viewers. It's simply impossible to convince a network that a series based on the Xanth books will beat out *Roseanne*. It's not impossible to believe that Xanth would do as well as *X-Files* or *Highlander*.

It might be happening even as we speak. It might be that project that today exists only as a script...perhaps just a few pages of character notes. It might be some producer falling in love with a book by Tad Williams or Roger Zelazny. Any one of them could do for fantasy on television what *Star Trek* did for science fiction. What wonders would we see? Keep watching. ■



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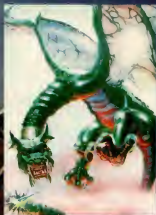
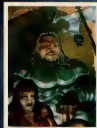
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## North America may be new but it's filled with diverse ancient folk traditions.

**T**HE DARTMOOR AREA OF ENGLAND, WHERE I MAKE MY HOME, IS A LANDSCAPE RICH with ancient magic: standing stones, castles, Bronze Age ruins, and all the legends that go along with them. It is an easy task to write about mythology in a place where old tales linger in the land, where the fires of winter solstice are still lit in the old stone circles on the moor—a ritual that is as old as time, marking the passing of the Seasonal King, invoking the sun's return.

But each winter as the nights grow long and the days grow cold, I pack up my old stone cottage, entrust my cats to the care of friends, and return to my own native shores. An English friend has asked me if it will be difficult to write about fantasy and mythology during the months when I am back in the United States, "in a land so new, and with no myths of its own." The opinion that ours is a land without a folklore tradition is not an uncommon one in Europe, or even among some Americans. This impression might be supported by a quick perusal of the books popular in the fantasy field, written by American authors yet set in Celtic or pseudo-Celtic lands. But a more careful study of current fantasy literature reveals that there is also a body of works drawing upon distinctly American folk traditions: the myths, tales, and lore of "Turtle Island"—as various tribal peoples have called our continent.

As I ponder my English friend's question, and its assumptions about American culture, I am living in the small desert house where I've spent winters for the last few years: a quiet spot outside of Tucson, Arizona, not far from the Mexico border. Coyotes howl in the surrounding hills—the star of local Trickster legends in which

Coyote plays the Hero or the Fool, both wise and dangerous all at once. The tall saguaro cactus just outside the office window reminds me of the Tohono O'Odham belief that saguaros house the souls of the dead. If you live a good and righteous life, you come back to earth as one of these cactuses which grow tall over hundreds of years; if you are not among the righteous, you must come back again as a human being.

Just north of here are Anasazi ruins more ancient than any to be found on Dartmoor. To the west, the Hohokam tribe's petroglyphs are etched onto the mountain rocks, images as mysterious as that vanished tribe themselves. In the Yaqui pueblos close to town, the Deer Dancers prepare for the spring ceremonies, extraordinary rituals mixing Indian, Spanish and Christian myth. South of town is "the White Dove of the Desert," the mission church of San Xavier del Bac, built in the 1780s. Inside the mission, the statues of the saints are decorated with photographs, gifts, and tin milagros left by people seeking miracles. Downtown just yesterday, at one of the local inter-tribal powwows, the old Native American songs,

the drums, the costumes, and the prayers reflected a mix of cultural traditions—a mythology that is neither dead nor locked away in dusty academic books, but still a vital part of daily life for many people.

The very idea of "the American West" has a whole folklore tradition of its own: cowboys and Indians, banditos, and pioneers and the stories that surrounded them. In this place, Anglo, Hispanic and Native American folkways have collided and merged. In the West, with its shrines and sacred mountains, its tall tales and tribal creation myths, the oral folk tradition is still very much alive. This land, like Dartmoor, is steeped in legends—and so, no, it's not hard to write about mythology here. Yet the myths of this landscape, this desert, are only one small part of the lore of Turtle Island.

Ours is a huge country compared to those of Europe. Its most salient characteristic (both its greatest strength and weakness) is the sheer diversity that comes of a largely immigrant population. The American folk tradition is thus equally diverse, encompassing not only

*As new peoples come to make their home here, they bring with them folk tales which are changed by the mystical, magical influences of Turtle Island. Shapeshifter by artist Mark Wagner.*





### *"The Silver Nereid"*

*It was the nereid Cora, one of the fifty daughters of King Nereus, who gave her name to the Coral Seas and the myriad small creatures that built the reefs that fringe the tropic seas. Cora lived in a coral palace and is said to have dined on sea foam and pearls. She is known as the protectress of sailors and fishermen, and for her enchanting song. Her insignia is the seahorse and she is especially fond of the fairy bangles that play hide and seek in her shining hair. She is seen here in her own silver and coral sea in a Dance of the Tides.*

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the ancient stories of the original tribal peoples, but the stories that have come to this land along with three centuries of immigration. The American Folklore Society separated this large body of folk material into four basic types: the relics of British folklore; the lore of unacculturated immigrant groups (the French, the Spanish, etc.); African American folklore; and Native American folklore. This month, in Part I, we'll look at fantasy books that draw inspiration from the first three categories; in Part II, in the next issue, we'll look at the various mythologies that fall under the Native American heading.

"Relics of British folklore" make up the largest part of the American folk tradition—by which I mean oral storytelling, ballads, folk beliefs, folk dramas, and the like. We are an English-speaking culture; this common language gives us all a grounding in the British tradition, no matter what our color or ethnic background. But British lore brought to the United States has been changed by the nature of this land and its peoples. The early Anglo settlers of the eastern seaboard were a hard-working, plain-speaking, and generally pious, religious lot. The Americanized tales and songs reflect this plain-speaking attitude and are stripped of all but the vestiges of the paganism that suffuses old British lore. You will find few fairies in the Americanized tales; often the Devil has taken their place, and the heroes are simple, clever folk who find ways to outwit him. While researching local folklore for a story collection recently, fantasy writer Ellen Steiber commented, "What I kept finding in books of American folklore were mostly tall tales. And I began to wonder if our propensity for tall tales didn't have something to do with settlers coming over from the smaller European countries and finding this vast, expansive land, and the land itself shaping heroes and deeds to match its almost incomprehensible scale."

In the eastern United States, the huge Appalachian mountain range is one of the places where the oral folk tradition still remains the strongest. The celebrated English folklore collector Cecil Sharp made a famous excursion into the mountains of North Carolina in 1916-1917, and then published the massive, classic volume of *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*. It was not until 1925, however, with the publication of Isabel Gordon Carter's *Tales from the Southern Blue Ridge*, that folklorists realized that a whole body of magical tales which were no longer extant in Britain had taken root in the New World. These are the "Jack tales," a cycle of stories about an engaging young hero who (according to folklorist Richard Chase) "has acquired the easy-going, unpretentious rural American manners that make him so different from his English cousin, the cocksure, dashing young hero of English fairy tales." Chase's collection, *The Jack Tales*, is an excellent resource for anyone interested in this lively material, as well as *Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in*

the United States by Richard M. Dorson.

Orson Scott Card has echoed the homespun magic of these eastern mountain tales in *Seventh Son* and the subsequent books of his wonderful "Alvin Maker" series. These books tell the story of the pioneers who crossed the Appalachians and headed west in a magical America where charms, hexes, beseechings, potions, dowders, and Second Sight are all part of daily life. Card has skillfully blended the rich magic of the white, black and red cultures of the early 1800s into a uniquely American story that is now deservedly a classic of the genre.

The late Manly Wade Wellman was a gifted writer from the pulp magazine era, as well as a historian whose works on southern American history once earned him a Pulitzer nomination. Wellman blended American history and myth in his "Silver John stories" (collected in *Who Fears the Devil*), about a minstrel with a silver-stringed guitar, wandering the Appalachian Mountains having supernatural adventures. William F. Wu has had stories reminiscent of Wellman's work published in many genre magazines, chronicling the ghostly adventures of one Jack Hong in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri. What makes Wu's work distinctive is his beautiful rendering of the Asian magic brought to America by Chinese immigrants.

For a more contemporary evocation of the magic in the bones of the American landscape, Terry Bisson's *Talking Man* starts off on the Tennessee-Kentucky line and takes off on a magical quest by means of a '62 Chrysler. Bisson spins his modern fantasy tale in a lyrical Kentucky voice that invests even the commonplace with a sense of wonder.

Several fantasy and mainstream writers use "the relics of British lore" in contemporary stories so deeply rooted in North American landscapes that they can truly be called American fantasies. Alice Hoffman does this with *Turtle Moon*, her subtly magical murder mystery set in the tropical heat of Florida. The ghostly stories in Bob Shacochis' *The Next New World* are set in several eastern states (as well as the Caribbean); the magical realism of Jack Cady's *The Sons of Noah & Other Stories* invests midwestern and northwestern America with enchantment; and Reginald McNight casts magic onto *The Kind of Light that Shines on Texas*. Another good down-home Texan tale is Delia Sherman's "Nanny Peters and the Feathery Bride" (*IF & SF*, Feb. 1990). I also highly recommend the charming *Mr. Death and the Redheaded Woman* by Helen Eutis (published in illustrated form by Greg Tietze Press).

While English folklore may be the largest immigrant influence on the American folk tradition, the stories and beliefs of other nations have permeated our culture as well. In fact, most of the popular fairy tales told to generations of American children are not English but German, French, or Russian, or from Denmark's Hans Christian Andersen.

Richard Dorson (in *Buying the Wind*) has



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collected the stories, "noodle tales," and proverbs of the Pennsylvania Deutch (more commonly known as the Pennsylvania Dutch), whose German language turned into a rich, strange dialect here in America. I grew up with these tales from my mother's people: whimsical stories of devils and hexes, wizards (called brauchers), and a prankish simpleton (or "noodle" character) called Tyl Eulenspiegel. These stories, like the Anglo-Appalachian tales, have a folksy, plain-speaking American flavor very different from the Old World fairy tales (called *marchen*) as recorded by the Brothers Grimm. Nancy Springer's *Hex Witch of Seldom* is a gorgeous and underrated work based on Pennsylvania Deutch folklore. Springer, who is also a Pennsylvania native, does an excellent job of using this material to create a fresh and moving fantasy story.

Mr. Dorson devotes another section of his American folklore study *Buying the Wind* to the colorful lore of the Louisiana Cajuns, who have turned the French language, culture, and music into something uniquely their own. One of the best books on the subject, *Louisiana Folk Tales*, can only be found in libraries now. These tales, retold in both French dialect and English translation, were collected by Alcee Fortier and published by the American Folklore Society in 1895. The book is divided into animal tales, in which the tricky *Compair Lapin* (rabbit) is always getting in and out of trouble; and wonderful, magical *marchen* (fairy tales) with an unusual Cajun flavor.

Jewell Parker Rhodes works with Cajun myth and the exotic cultural melting pot of New Orleans in her first novel, *Voodoo Dreams*, a magical historical novel based on the real-life story of "voodoo queen" Marie Laveau. The notion of "voodoo" magic was part of the folkloric tradition found across the southeastern states. In the 1890s, African American writer Charles W. Chesnutt published a collection of stories called *The Conjure Woman*, based on oral tales from the South in the time before the Civil War. Originally written in a thick dialect, the stories have been retold in a more accessible form by Ray Anthony Sharp in *Conjure Tales*. "Conjuring," writes Sharp, "was the belief that certain people, called conjure doctors, had supernatural powers. They exercised these powers with the aid of roots, herbs, and many other kinds of ingredients. The conjure woman worked the roots by rubbing them in her hands, or moving the root between her fingers." Unlike Chesnutt's white contemporaries (such as Joel Chandler Harris, author of the better known "Uncle Remus" tales), who were penning folksy stories drawing upon the southern black folk tradition, Chesnutt's conjure tales do not hide the painful realities of lives lived in slavery.

More recently, the skilled science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler has written a powerful American time-travel fantasy, *Kindred*, that also draws upon the history and lore of

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black slaves in the South. Toni Morrison's unforgettable novel *Beloved*, which won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize, is a haunting, heart-breaking ghost story, using fantasy to explore rural American history just after the Civil War. Charlotte Watson Sherman is one of the best of the modern writers drawing upon the African American folkloric tradition to tell contemporary magical realist stories in her entertaining collection *Killing Color*. Randall Kenan, who was raised in North Carolina, has been hailed by critics as "our 'black' Marquez." This master storyteller's extraordinary work can be found in *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead*.

Spanish-speaking Americans have one of the most vivid folkloric traditions in this country. While this can be found throughout the United States, it is most evident among the Spanish Americans of northern New Mexico and the Mexican Americans in the border states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. A typical and ubiquitous example is the legend of the Weeping Woman, *La Llorona*—a story that has existed since Aztec times (and may be connected to the Aztec goddess *Civacoatl*). The tale has been attached to various historical personages, but the basic motif remains the same: a highborn man makes love to a beautiful peasant girl, who bears him three children. When he abandons her to marry a woman of his own class (or own race, in the versions where the man is Spanish and the woman Indian), the girl kills her children and then wanders the hills forevermore, wailing and shrieking her loss. Her ghost now appears as a woman in white with long black hair, fingernails of tin, and the face of a bat, a horse, or a skeleton. She is often found in dry river beds, and encountering her can be fatal. Once again, Dorson's *Buying the Wind* provides an introduction to these legends and myths, but for a more extensive exploration, I recommend John O. West's *Mexican-American Folklore*.

Lately there has been a renaissance of fiction by Spanish-speaking Americans. In *Other Words*, edited by Roberta Fernandez, is a terrific, fat recent collection of literature by Latinos of the United States, and includes lovely magic realist works. Sandra Cisneros is a talented writer who mixes realism and magical realism in story collections such as *Woman Hollering Creek*. Kathleen Alcala is an American writer whose stories venture into Mexico and are permeated with Mexican magic in *Mrs. Vargas* and *The Dead Naturalist*. George Szantos is a Canadian author who lives part of each year in Mexico. His witty and magical cycle of stories collected in *The Underside of Stones* is highly recommended. Alfredo Vega, Jr.'s recent first novel, *La Maravilla*, is one I also recommend often these days, for it is a wonderful coming-of-age tale set in Arizona in the 1950s, mixing the folkloric traditions of Mexican and Native Americans with those of their Anglo neighbors.

Continued on page 77

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# EXCERPTS FROM THE DIARY OF SAMUEL PEPYS

BY JOHN MOORE

Illustration by Janet Aulisio Dannheiser

**28** *Down to the river to visit the victualing ships, where I find all out of order. And come home to dinner, and then to write a letter to the Duke of Albemarle about the victualing ships; and carried it myself to the coun-*

*cil chamber, where it was read; and when they rise, my Lord Chancellor, passing by, stroked me on the head, and told me that the Board had read my letter and taken order for the punishing of the watermen for not appearing on board the ships. And so did the King afterward, who doth now know me so well, that he never sees me but he speaks to me about our Navy business.*

*In much trouble yet as to the pains I have taken and the rubs I expect yet to meet with about the business of Tanger. The fleet, with about 106 ships, upon the coast of Holland, in sight of the Dutch within the Texell. Great fears of the Sickness here in the City, it being said that two or three houses are already shut up. God preserve us all.*

**24** *UP BY 4 A-CLOCK IN THE MORNING; AND WITH W. HEWER there till 12 without intermission, putting some papers in order. Thence to the coffee-house with Creed, where I have not been in a great while—where all the news is of the Dutch being gone out—and of the plague growing upon us in this town and of remedies against it; some saying one thing, some another.*

*Thence to dinner at Trinity house—and so to Gresham College, where Mr. R. Hooke read a very curious Lecture about the recent Comett, among other things, proving very probably that this is the very same Comett that appeared before in the year 1618, and that*



*in such a time probably it will appear again—which is a very new opinion—but all will be in print. And this day I did pay my admission money—40s—to the Society. Here were very fine discourses—and experiments; but I do lack philosophy enough to understand them and so cannot remember them.*

*Thence home and to see my Lady Pen—where my wife and I were shown a fine rarity: of fishes kept in a glass of water, that will live so for ever; and finely marked they are, being foreign. So to supper at home and to bed.*

**1** *UP, AND TO MR. POVY'S, AND BY HIS BEDSIDE TALKED A GOOD while. And so home, and at noon, going to the Change, met my Lord Brunker, Sir Robert Murry, Deane Wilkins, and Mr. Hooke, going by Coache to Coll. Blunt's for dinner. So they stopped and took me with them. No extraordinary dinner, nor any other entertainment good, but noble discourse all day long did please me. It getting late, Dean Wilkins and Mr. Hooke and I walked to Redriffe, and thence to my house to drink, and did give them some sweetmeats—Mr. Hooke inquiring all the way about getting a visitor from Holland, which is very difficult because of the war. And did write him a pass through the naval blockade and thence sent them with a lantern home—two worthy persons as are in England, I think, or the world.*



This day I am told that Dr. Burnett, my physician, is this morning dead of the plague—which is strange, his man dying so long ago, and his house this month open again. Now himself dead—poor unfortunate man.

31 THUS THIS MONTH ENDS, WITH GREAT SADNESS UPON THE public through the greatness of the plague, everywhere through the Kingdom almost. Every day sadder and sadder news of its increase. In the city died this week 7,496; and of them 6,102 of the plague. But it is feared that the true number of the dead this week is near 10000—partly from the poor that cannot be taken notice of through the greatness of number, and partly from the Quakers and others that will not have any bell rung for them. But Lord to consider the madness of the people in this town, who will (because they are forbid) come in Crowds along with the dead Corps to see them buried. My finding that the Angell Tavern at the lower end of Tower Hill shut up; and more than that, the alehouse at the Tower stairs; and more than that, poor Payne my waterman hath buried a child and is dying himself—that both my servants, W. Hewers and Tom Edwards, have lost their fathers, both in St. Sepulcher's parish—doth put me into great apprehensions of melancholy, and with good reason. But I put off the thoughts of sadness as much as I can; and the rather to keep my wife in good heart, and family also.

22 TO THE CROWN TAVERN BEHIND THE EXCHANGE BY APPOINTMENT, and there the meeting of Gresham College. Dr. Goddard did fill us with talk in defense of his and his fellow-physicians' going out of town in the plague-time; saying that their particular patients were most gone out of town, and they left at liberty—and a good deal more, &c. But what, among other fine discourse, pleased me most, was Sir G. Ent about Respiration; that it is not to this day known or concluded on among physicians, nor to be done either, how that action is managed by nature or for what use it is. In then came Mr. Hooke, and Mr. A. Leeuwenhooke, a Dutchman who has engaged in much fine correspondence with the Society on the subject of microscopy. And in truth, he is a man of the most ingenuity, being withal no scholler. And there he did debate again with Mr. Hooke upon the subject of spontaneous generation, which Mr. Hooke favors, both having debated the same in the Society's Journals, though too gentlemanly to name each other in print. Here late, till poor Dr. Merritt was drunk; and so all home, and I to bed.

7 UP AND TO THE OFFICE, WHERE WE SAT ALL THE MORNING; AND home to dinner, and then to the office again, being pretty good friends with my wife again, no angry words passing. In the evening comes Mr. Reeves with a 12-foot glass; and so I left the

*The cellar was filled with a great gelatinous mass, very grey and foul, and that glistened and undulated, although there was no draught or vibration to move it. And in the muck are the bodies of various rats, which appeared to be in various states of digestion.*

office and home, where I met Mr. Batelier with my wife, in order to their going tomorrow by agreement to Bow to see a dancing meeting. But Lord, to see how soon I could conceive evil fears and thought concerning them. So Reeves and I and they up to the top of the house, and there we endeavored to see the moon and Saturn and Jupiter, but the heaven proved cloudy, and so we lost our labor, having taken pains to get things together in order to the managing of our long glass. So down to supper, and presently arrived Mr. Newton with his 6-foot glass, bringing news that Deptford and Greenwich are now afresh exceedingly afflicted with Sicknesses, more than ever. And he is able to show, with history and arithmetic, that each of the plague times was accompanied by the return of certain Comets, and said that Mr. Hooke and Mr. Boyle were most urgent that he publish his calculations. But it will all have to wait, as he is going back to the country.

At 1 a'clock it clears to a mighty fine bright night, so upon my leads, though very sleepy, we look upon the moon and Jupiter, and the sights mighty pleasant. And one of the glasses I will buy, it being very useful. So to bed, mighty sleepy, but with much pleasure—Reeves lying at my house; and mighty proud I am (and ought to be thankful to God Almighty) that I am able to spare a bed for my friends.

8 UP AND TO THE OFFICE, WHERE ALL THE MORNING WE SAT. AT noon I home to dinner alone, and then to Sir W. Batten's and there sat the most of the afternoon, talking and drinking too much with my Lord Bruncker, Sir G. Smith, G. Cocke, and others, very merry. So to my office a little, and then to the Duke of Abermarle's about some business. The streets mighty empty all the way now, even in London, which is a sad sight. And to Westminster Hall, where talking, hearing of Mrs. Michell's son's family. And poor Will that used to sell us ale at the Hall door—his wife and three children dead, all I think in a day. Late at the office and then home to supper, having taken a pullet home with me. And then comes Mr. Hooke and Mr. Leeuwenhooke, unannounced and very excited. For they have been walking through all of London these past weeks and marking the plague areas on a large map, seeking what Mr. Leeuwenhooke calls "the reservoir of the contagion." And he expounds his theory that the disease is caused by microscopic animals that swim through the air and colonate the lungs. Which in truth is the strangest discourse ever I heard and would be wont to dismiss it had not Mr. Hooke expounded it also. And made appointment with them to go out tomorrow night and destroy the center of contagion, which they believe to have located. And so they left and myself to bed, thinking I have agreed to a very foolish thing, but so not to appear a coward, and in truth some good may come of it.

9 BREAKFAST WITH MR. ASHMOLE, WHEREIN HE DID ASSURE ME that frogs and many insects do fall from the Sky ready formed. And so I think that if vermin can descend from Comets, then perhaps larger animals also. So brought my French Gun to the Bull head Tavern and one True Locke the famous gunsmith, that is a mighty ingenious man, and he did take my gun to pieces and

charge it with powder and make me understand the secrets thereof; and upon the whole, doth find it a very good piece of work and truly wrought, but for certain not a thing to be used much with safety.

Mr. Hooke and Mr. Leeuwenhooke arrived of the evening and I spent some little time trying to dissuade them from their search, for it is almost certain that we will find our death of the plague, if we find nothing else. But they would not relent, and so we set about to Cheapside, near St. Mary-le-Bow, the two of them armed with buckets of pitch and lanterns, and I with my French Pistol. But in truth we traipsed about through half of London, up one street and across another, with much consulting of their map and discourse about vectors and incubation time and other such philosophy as I know little about. And sad to say the number of houses that were shut up and abandoned, and some of these we went into, going down into the cellars, where we found many rats, many of them dead, but all too many not dead at all. And the two of them did seem to think this was a very great discovery, which I thought a little mad. But by and by we arrive at the King's bakers house in Pudding Lane, it being very dark now and no moon or stars and the streets empty. So we entered and going downstairs to the cellar, we found another cellar below that, very damp, and emitting of a strange odor. Thus we forced the door open and there did see the most gruesome sight that ever I can attest to.

The cellar was filled with a great gelatinous mass, very grey and foul, and that glistened and undulated, although there was no draught or vibration to move it. And the cellar was full to a depth of 6 inches, I would say. And in the muck are the bodies of various rats, which appeared to be in various states of digestion. Then says Mr. Hooke with great satisfaction, "This is it," and lights his pitch from the lantern and pours it down. And Mr. Leeuwenhooke does the same. But then the most amazing thing, the ooze starts to flow up the ladder, meaning to attack us, and we all take flight. I fire my gun into it, to no avail, and we run very fast, all three dropping our lanterns, and we do not stop until we have reached St. Magnus Church in Fishstreet. And then we look back and see that the King's bakers is starting to burn. And I endeavor to raise the alarm, but Mr. Leeuwenhooke stops me, saying, "No it must get a good start, it must all burn down, else you will never be rid of the Sicknesses." But then someone else raises the cry and so the decision is taken from me.

We go then to Mr. Hooke's house and drink tea, the first ever I have drunk this beverage and it is very soothing. I said, "That was not a microscopic animal." And Mr. Leeuwenhooke explains to me about composite animals, such as the slime molds he has examined with his microscope, made of tiny animals working together. But I do not want to hear more of it and so home and to bed, but slept very uneasily.

5 ABOUT 7 ROSE AGAIN TO DRESS MYSELF, AND THERE LOOKED OUT at the window and saw the fire not so much as it was, and further off. So to my closet to set things to rights after yesterday's cleaning. By and by Jane comes and tells me that she hears that above 300 houses were burned down last night by the fire we set, and

that it was now burning down all Fishstreet by London Bridge. So I made myself ready presently, and walked to the Tower and there got up upon one of the high places, Sir J. Robinsons little son going up with me; and there I did see the houses at that end of the bridge all on fire, and an infinite great fire on this and the other side the end of the bridge—which, among other people, did trouble me for poor little Michell and our Sarah on the bridge. Everybody endeavoring to remove their goods, and flinging into the River or bringing them into lighters that lay off. Poor people staying in their houses as long as till the very fire touched them, and then running into boats or clambering from one pair of stairs by the waterside to another. And among other things, the poor pigeons I perceive were loathe to leave their houses, but hovered about the windows and balconies till they were some of them burned their wings and fell down. We stayed till, it being darkish, we saw the fire as only one entire arch of fire from this to the other side of the bridge, and in a bow up the hill, for an arch of above a mile long. It made me weep to see it. The churches, houses, and all on fire and flaming at once, and a horrid noise the flames made, and the cracking of houses at their ruine.

6 NOW BEGINS THE PRACTICE OF BLOWING up of houses in the Tower street, those next the Tower, which at first did frighten people more than anything; but it stopped the fire where it was done—it bringing down the houses to the ground in the same places they stood, and then it was easy to quench what little fire was in it, though it kindled nothing almost. So that it is got so far that way and all the Old Bayly, and was running down to Fleetstreet. And Pauls is burned, and all Cheapside. I wrote to my father this night, but the post-house being burned, the letter could not go. But a boy arrived with a message from Mr. Hooke warning me not to speak of our adventure, lest we should all be hanged for the fire. And this, I think, I did not need anyone to tell me. Yet already one can tell there is great reduction in the Sickenesse, at least that is a consolation.

21 TO WOOLWICH THIS MORNING WITH Mr. Hooke to see Mr. Leeuwenhouk off and back to Holland. And before he left, much swearing and taking of oaths among the three of us, never to speak of our part in the setting of the fire. And so too the germination theory of disease, which Mr. Leeuwenhouk has written, he will not now publish, for it is evidence of our involvement. A pity, for it is a great work of scholarship. But, says Mr. Hooke, "Every idea has its time," and soon someone else will chance upon the same idea, and when that happens, we must simply nod and keep our lips tight.

The plague continues to decrease, the count for this week was 646. Thanks be to God. ♦



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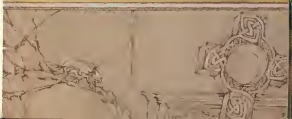


# HIS TRUE AND ONLY WIFE

BY LOUISE COOPER  
*Illustration by Tom Canty*

**Y**EARS AGO, WHEN THEY WERE BOTH CHILDREN, Leah had said, "I'll marry you one day. When we're grown and Mammati is dead. She'll have to die sometime, and then I'll be your true and only wife."

Carolán had only smiled in the slow, pleasing way he had and pulled another grass stem to strip and chew, savoring the sweet-sharp taste while he enjoyed the spring sun's warmth on his back. It was just another of Leah's promises, another of the wild and secret ambitions they so often talked of down here by the old well in the valley where no one ever came to disturb their games and fantasies. In truth, he probably would marry her one day. It would be the natural thing to do, after all, for weren't they the oldest of friends and the oldest of cohorts? And her mother would die.







One day. One far-off, happy day the old witch would meet her just end—Carolyn hastily crossed himself for such an unholy and unworthy thought, but it was true nonetheless. One day, Leah would be free.

But to the disappointment not only of Carolyn and Leah but of the whole village, the old woman lived far beyond the span that natural justice should have dictated. Leah continued to suffer under her dictatorial and increasingly eccentric rule, and the bruises and black eyes that had been a part of her life since she had first learned to walk still blossomed on her like flowers on a bush. And as Mammati grew older and madder, her daughter also suffered under the stigma of being increasingly ostracized by their neighbors. No one held Leah to blame, of course. A child has no say in its own parentage, and it wasn't her fault that she was a bastard get and her mother one of the devil's own; indeed, twice a year, on Forgiveness Day and Sinners' Night, Father Borlugh exhorted his flock to say solemn prayers for Leah's salvation. Yet though they obeyed their priest with a good will, the villagers were less generous when it came to welcoming the child herself in their midst. Happless victim of circumstance she might be, but that didn't make her any less the witch's daughter. And by the time she was nine years old, a few of the tabbies were already hinting at the growing and unmistakable physical likeness she bore to her Mammati.

The gossip of the tabbies was lost on Carolyn, who, like any wise boy, had better things to do than keep company with old women. Leah was his special friend, and one day he would probably marry her. That was all he knew and all he cared to know; the future with its adult complications could look after itself for a few years yet. However, Carolyn's grandmother, whose sharp eyes missed very little in the village, had begun to whisper certain observations in his mother's ear about her son and That Girl. And his mother, alarmed by what she heard, joined forces with the old dame to nag her husband into taking action. Carolyn's father was by nature a placid and uncomplicated man, and in his heart he wanted no truck with their speculations. Carolyn was an unfiled puppy still learning his letters at dame school: what did he know or care about girls as anything but playmates? But the women persisted, each argument grew shriller and angrier, and at last Carolyn's father capitulated. Something must be done, they constantly told him; very well, something *would* be done, as it seemed it was the only way to make them cease their pestering and allow him to live his life in peace.

So on his eleventh birthday Carolyn was apprenticed to Laery the garter. The news caused a stir in the village; Laery was a highly respected man in a highly respected profession—a man of the world, too, for rumor had it that he had on occasion traveled as far as twenty miles from his home village in the course of his work. A private man and a lifelong bachelor, he had never taken an apprentice before, though many young hopefuls had tried to ingratiate themselves under his dour eye. How Carolyn's father had persuaded him to break with his habit no one knew, but it was commonly believed that the miracle must have been helped upon its way by a healthy contribution from the family's purse. Still, that only proved Carolyn senior to be a wiser man than he looked, for with no natural heir to follow in Laery's footsteps, his apprentice would surely inherit the prosperous business when Laery was finally called to his maker. Young Carolyn, they said, was a lucky little devil. And the tabbies, nodding sagely and sliding their gazes aside in an eloquently expressive way that bypassed any need for words, implied that his family was lucky in more ways than one, for with their boy gone to Laery's village, the question of That Girl would soon be a burden lifted from their shoulders.

The blacksmith's wife happened to meet Leah at the well in the valley when Leah went to fetch water for her mother and gleefully told her the news. Leah received the information in stony silence, then walked away into the wood and waited for the smirking woman to depart. When she had gone and Leah was sure she was out of earshot, she returned to the well and screamed down into its stale depths with all the strength her lungs possessed. The scream echoed back as though a devil's imp was crouching down there in

the water and mocking her, and when Leah finally realized that this was no comfort, no ease to the pain inside her, she straightened and stared for a very long time at the rustling trees that climbed the valley slope. What she thought was private, what she felt would never be uttered to another living soul. But she was resolved in what she must do. Carolyn was gone; but one day he would come back to her. By then, she told herself fiercely, by then it would be different. And, hating Mammati to the depths of her soul, she turned away from the well and trudged back toward the lonely, cramped and loathsome cottage that she must for a while yet call home.



IN THE SPRING MORNING when she came back from an early foray to market and found Mammati stiff and cold in her bed, Leah knelt down by the hearthstone and offered a prayer of thanksgiving. Then, soberly and diligently, she set about the necessary tasks. Father Borlugh wouldn't consider for one moment the idea of burying Mammati on hallowed ground, and so a wake, such as might have been held for anyone else in the district, was clearly out of the question. So Leah lit a candle and sat silently by her mother's corpse until sunset. Then she left the house, took a shovel, and walked to the end of the vegetable patch, where she dug a hole, sternly resisting the temptation to sing as she worked. Heaving the old woman out of bed and along the overgrown path almost defeated her, but she struggled on until at last she reached her goal, then had the satisfaction of seeing the withered old face for the last time before the first spade of earth thumped into the hole with a soft and faintly obscene sound and covered Mammati's features forever.

Silently, methodically, Leah replaced the soil she had dug and patted down the resulting shallow mound. Then she set the shovel aside, put the palms of her hands together and said, "Day behind me, night before me, bless the mother who once bore me. God help us all, amen," in a flatly dutiful monotone. That done, she stared at the mound for a few minutes, still not entirely convinced that the earth wouldn't suddenly fountain into the air and Mammati burst out of her grave screeching with laughter at the joke she had played on her daughter. But nothing happened. Only an owl called somewhere in the wood, and Leah knew that owls were harbingers of death. All was well, then. She was truly free at last.

She walked back to the house. The hearth fire had gone out, but that didn't matter; she had bought more oil for the lamps this morning. She picked up the tin in which the oil was kept, and spilled its contents all over the floor. The familiar, fishy smell made her nostrils curl, but she smiled at the stench, for this was the last, the very last time that she would be forced to endure it. Then she took Mammati's tinder box, retreated to the doorway, and lit a scrap of rag. It caught, the flame licking bright and clean and quick as though the elements themselves favored her tonight. Leah's smile widened; she tossed the rag onto the oil-soaked floor, and as the first whiff of yellow fire erupted through the room, she turned and ran, leaping and dancing through the vegetable patch and over Mammati's grave and away into the woods, with Carolyn's name on her lips.

"YOUNG CAROLAN?" SAID THE WHEELWRIGHT'S WIFE, SMILING unpleasantly in the way that Leah had come to know well over the years. "No. Haven't seen hide nor hair of him for months gone by." She sounded pleased by her inability to help. Leah, who had spent the night dancing for sheer glee in the woods and had walked into the village with the coming of morning, tossed her unbound auburn curls so that they glinted in the sunlight—she saw the envious flash

in the woman's eyes—and strode away.

"Carolyn?" The blacksmith (his wife, thankfully, wasn't in the yard this morning) shook his head gravely. "No, lass, we've seen nothing of him here, nor his master Laery neither. You'd best inquire at his father's cottage."

At the cottage she was confronted by the old dame, a crone now, with two blackthorn sticks to support her and a temper soured with the rigors of time. "My grandson," she told Leah, "is away in Laery's village as he's been for ten years past, and his Mamaw and Dadaw are away there too now, to see him wed."

Leah stood very still. "Wed..."

"Wed." The crone repeated the word emphatically and with satisfaction. "So there's nothing here for you, miss. Away with you; away, and don't show your trollop's face on my threshold a second time." And she shut the door in Leah's face.

For a long time Leah stood outside the gate, staring at the cottage, which seemed to stare belligerently back, and telling herself over and again that it was not, it was not, it was not true. It was not. Wasn't she to be Carolyn's only wife? Hadn't they promised? It was not true.

An odd, broken little sound came from her throat at last, and she turned and ran, her feet thudding in the dust, away to the priest's house.

She had never dared to approach this place before. Mammatti had forbidden it, and even if she'd been prepared to risk defying Mammatti, there was always the shadow of the church behind the house to deter her, every stone seeming to frown down a silent anathema. But now she didn't think of Mammatti or anathemas or anything else; she stumbled through the gate and up the hard-trodden path, and hammered with her fists on the forbidding oak door.

Father Borlagh was at home and opened the door to her savage knocking. He stared at the wild-eyed, wild-haired witch's daughter, and his eyebrows, like small, prickly hedgehogs above the button-black eyes, came sharply together in a frown.

"Leah? What is it, girl? What do you want?"

Leah glared back at him, defiance and defense and determination radiating from every pore of her. "Mammatti's dead," she said. "I did the right thing by her. I sat by her all day yesterday and then I buried her in the garden and I said God-Help-U's over her, and now I've come to find Carolyn."

"Ah." Father Borlagh, like all good priests of his persuasion, knew enough about his flock and their doings to comprehend her meaning immediately. "Carolyn, is it? Well, now..."

"I saw her," Leah interjected before he could continue. "The old bel-dame, his gammer. She said Carolyn's to be wed!"

Father Borlagh didn't have to answer; his expression gave the truth away immediately, and to Leah the mingling of embarrassment, shame and irritation that flowered across his plump face was more terrible than if he had pronounced a curse on her there and then. She felt something dear and precious shriveling up inside her, withering her heart like a dead leaf, and she stared at the priest, willing his features to change again, willing him to laugh suddenly and pat her head as he sometimes used to when she was little and he couldn't avoid meeting her in the street, and tell her that the bel-dame was joking and it was not, was not true.

Her prayers went unanswered. Father Borlagh began to nod slowly, and seemed to go on nodding for a very long time. At last Leah couldn't bear the silence any longer, and she burst out, "When?"

The priest stopped nodding and the tip of his tongue appeared, wetting his lower lip. "Now then; what's the day to be? Not that I'd be sure to know of course, seeing that the family didn't see fit even to invite their own priest to the nuptials, let alone ask me to perform the holy rite, and if that's not a sign of the heathen times we live in then I don't know what is—"

With a silent ferocity that owed more than a nod to Mammatti, Leah wished a plague of warts on the old fool and an imp to bite off his blathering tongue. "When?" she screeched.

"Today, I think it is." Abruptly his eyes grew hard, like little chips

of coal, as he stared at her. "Yes. Today. In Laery's village."

Leah's heart began to pound under her ribs, hurting her, squashing the breath from her lungs. What was the hour? How much time did she have? Her voice sawing in her throat as if from desperate want of water, she said, "How far is it? Laery's village—how far, and which way?"

The priest frowned. "Now, child, that's not a wise thing to think of! Calla's a fine and good and handsome girl, and she'll be the right wife for Carolyn. You mustn't—"

"I'm the right wife for Carolyn!" She stored the name *Calla* away securely in her mind. Mammatti would have known what to do about Calla.

"Now, Leah!" Father Borlagh drew himself up to his full height, so that the wind caught his black robe and made it flap like a demon's wings. "That is enough! Will you try to ruin Carolyn's wedding, which should be the happiest day of his life?"

She clenched her teeth and spat through them, "I love him!"

"Indeed you don't, or you'd have the good sense to let him go to a woman who's a fit match for his station in life!" Father Borlagh rejoined tartly. "Carolyn is a young man of substance now, with a fine future before him—"

Leah started to shake. "I'm not good enough for him? Is that what you're saying to me?"

"Well, if you'll insist on forcing it from my own lips—yes. That is what I'm saying to you." His face took on a pious look now. "I'll not speak ill of the departed, so I've nothing to say about the black soul of your late mother. But she was your mother whether or not you chose her, and a witch's daughter brought up like a savage in the woods and without the sanctity of baptism and righteous fear of her betters is not the wife for a goodly young man like Carolyn!"

**I**N THE HATEFUL YEARS UNDER MAMMATI'S YOKE LEAH HAD learned above all else to control her naturally hectic temper, and she controlled it now—at least outwardly. Her head drooped, her feet scuffed at the hard-packed earth beneath them, and Father Borlagh did not know her well enough to recognize the difference between true capitulation and a reasonably skilled acting performance.

She said, in the voice of one who had reluctantly accepted defeat, "How far is Laery's village, Father?"

"Well now, I don't think I should tell you that." But his tone had softened; even if she was past saving, he would be a hard man and a poor priest if he couldn't find it in himself to pity her just a little. "Why would you want to wear out your feet to no good purpose? Carolyn's gone from you now, child. Be content, and trust in God to make you a better girl."

"Yes," Leah said, nodding and taking care that he couldn't see her expression. "Yes, Father, you're right, and I will. But I'd like to see Carolyn one last time. To wish him good fortune."

The man was a fool, she thought. Either that, or so vain that he couldn't countenance the idea that she might not have heeded his words of wisdom. His voice softened still further—it sounded the way a dead thing smelled in the summer, sweet and sickly, with something rotten at its core—and he reached out as though to lay a hand on her shoulder, then thought better of it. "Well now, Leah, that would be the right and noble thing to do, and so perhaps I'll tell you after all if you're so set on it. Laery's village lies half a day's walk to the southeast, and you'll know Laery's house by the sign of the horse and wagon that hangs over the lintel."

"Southeast. The sign of the horse and wagon." She looked up and smiled so guilelessly that Father Borlagh wondered for a rash moment if she might not have been her Mammatti's child at all but a foundling. "Thank you, Father."

"You'll thank me best by being a good girl now that the witch has gone." He signed a blessing at her. "I'll say a prayer for you before my own altar."

"Say another one for Carolyn's new wife, Father." The nature of Leah's smile changed subtly, then suddenly the one cracked bell in the church tower began to bang out a summons, calling the good

people of the village to morning devotions. Over the noise Leah shouted, "She'll be the one who needs it!"

Father Borlagh watched her run away down the street, then turned and, like a great black bat, swooped toward the church to greet his flock, wondering just what it was that the girl had said.

**L**EAH TRICKED A PASSING FARMER INTO GIVING HER a ride on his cart by showing him her legs and promising him favors as soon as they reached a quiet enough spot. She sat atop the cabbage sacks for two-thirds of the distance to Laery's village before the man finally insisted on payment, at which she sprang down and sprinted away with his furious curses following her along the road. The sun had passed the zenith by then and, aware that time was not her friend, she settled into a taxing but necessary jog until at last a sizeable village came into view ahead. As she limped past the boundary stone, she heard the bells of a finer church than Father Borlagh's begin to ring out a celebration peal.

Leah stopped in the middle of the deserted street, which suddenly seemed to her like a scene from some desolate hell. She was too late. The white cords and the red cords had been tied, the shoes had been filled with grain, and the bells were announcing the holy union of Carolan and Calla.

She reached the church in time to see the bridal party emerge. Though she hadn't set eyes on him for ten years she would have known Carolan instantly even without the scarlet bridegroom's clothes to mark him, for though he was so much taller and his chest and shoulders so much broader and his hair now cut short at the sides and long at the back in the fashion of the well-to-do market towns, the eyes and the smile were those of the Carolan she had loved for all of her life. Beside him, in a white gown, her black hair bound up with the twining ivy and the bride's bouquet of yellow and red in her hand, Calla walked in the place that should have been Leah's. She was lovely. No, Leah amended with a surge of spitefulness; not lovely, for her eyebrows were too heavy; her mouth too generous and her body too sturdy for real beauty. But handsome. Even in the depths of her bitterness Leah couldn't deny that Carolan's new wife was handsome.

From behind a moss-grown gravestone that, had she been able to read, would have told her that beneath this earth lay the blessed remains of Tomas, son of Ruar and Maeve, departed this world aged seven months and now sleeping in the arms of angels, Leah watched the procession leave for the churchyard. Carolan's and Calla's hands were tied together by the holy cords, and to the strains of a fife and tabor, the wedding guests laughed and shouted and threw petals and wheat grains over the couple. A jester in motley pranced in and out of the group, whinnying like a horse, and Leah's lip curled in a sneer, for she knew how much these professional luck-bringers charged for their services. If Carolan had married his true wife, he'd have had no cause to hire a fool to ensure good fortune. Now, though...she smiled. He and his handsome girl would need more than a prancing, posturing charlatan to stand between them and what their futures would hold.

The party was moving on, the sounds of rejoicing growing fainter as the wedding guests turned out of the churchyard and away along the street. Leah didn't attempt to follow them. She knew how to find Laery's house when she needed to, and until then she was content to bide her time. She sat down behind the gravestone and idly began to pick daisies to weave into a chain to wear around her neck.

THE BELLTOWER CLOCK WAS STRIKING MIDNIGHT WHEN THE FIRST wedding guests began to leave. Laery's house still shook to the sounds of drum and fiddle and the stamping of feet; the hardiest would stay on dancing and drinking long into the night, but gradually the number of celebrants was beginning to thin out.

Carolan, as befitted the bridegroom, personally saw each party away. He was returning to the house after the third such farewell when a shadow moved in the hedge beside the gate and a figure

stepped into his path.

She said: "Carolan," and he didn't recognize her voice. Then, in a reflection of light from inside the house, he saw the color of her eyes and the guinea-gold glint of her hair. Ten years fell away, and he remembered the girl who had been his playmate and confidante at the well in the valley so long ago.

"Leah..." Astonishment filled his voice—and something else. Chagrin? Guilt? Leah wasn't sure. "What are you doing here?"

She continued to look him squarely in the face and he thought she smiled, though the dark made it hard to tell.

"I came to find you," she said. Her voice was different; older—as it must be, of course, though he found it disconcerting—and with an edge to it that hadn't been there in the old days. "Mammat's dead, so I came to remind you of our promise."

"Promise?" Carolan was baffled. "What promise was that, Leah?"

She drew breath with a sharp hiss, like a cat. "That I'd be your true and only wife." A pause. "You've forgotten, haven't you? You've forgotten what we said!"

"Of course I've not forgotten!"

But she knew from his tone that he was lying, and she fired back at him. "You have forgotten! You were eight years old and I was seven, and we said—"

"Eight?" Suddenly there was laughter and relief in his voice. "By all the angels, Leah, we were nothing more than babbies! We must have said a hundred crazy things to each other in those days, a thousand, a million! If we were to keep to all our babbies' promises we'd be in a pretty scrape by now!"

In the darkness Leah's teeth showed white. "That wasn't a babbies' promise, and you know it wasn't! We pledged ourselves, Carolan, you for my true and only husband and me for your true and only wife! And now..." She swung round, one arm indicating Laery's house and the noisy festivities. "Now you've forsaken all that we said and you've married her. Why, Carolan? Why?"

"Leah, it was just a game between us! We're grown now, we're different."

"I'm not different. I still love you. And I know you still love me. Deep down, you do."

Carolan hesitated, then decided that he must say it. If he didn't tell her the truth now, coldly and bluntly, she would cling to her fancy and he wouldn't be rid of her. Better to earn her hatred than have her following him about like a dog and upsetting Calla.

He said, "I don't love you, Leah. I love my wife, my Calla. That's why I married her and not you."

"That's not true! You do love me!"

"I do not. Look into my face and I'll say it again. I do not love you, Leah; and I don't want you interfering in my new life and trying to spoil it. Whatever we might or might not have said in the past, we're grown up now and things are different. I don't wish you any ill, Leah, and I'm glad for you that your Mammat finally died and let you free. But I don't want to see you anymore. I want you to go away."

Leah froze for a few moments. Then, with a new eagerness in her voice, she said, "Let us go away, Carolan! Together—let's go tonight, now, and then you can forget all this and come back to me, and—"

"Holy blood and bones, haven't you listened to a word I've said?"

Carolan interrupted incredulously. "No, Leah, no! I don't want you, I don't want to be with you." He paused. "And if you don't go away now, this minute, I shall tell the priest and he'll come and drive you away! Do you understand me now?"

She did. She stepped back, feeling the wild hope crumbling to grave dust within her.

"All right," she said in a new, gentler tone. "I'll go, if that's what you want. But you're telling lies to your own self, Carolan. I know that, and before long you'll know it too." Then she smiled, and with her face in deepest shadow, the smile took on dire meaning. "Enjoy your time with your handsome new wife while you can, for it won't last. I'll see to that, Carolan. I'll see to that!"

And, brushing past him with a flick of hair and a whirl of dusty

skirt, she ran away down the dark street like a fleeing ghost.

SIX MONTHS LATER, CAROLAN AND HIS WIFE CAME HOME TO HIS OWN village. The idea was Laery's; the carter was an ambitious man and considered that his apprentice had learned enough to be entrusted with the running of a second branch of the business. With horses and wagons established in two villages at once, Laery's trade could expand in the grand manner. Laery would prosper; he would be wealthy; he would become a *persona*.

There was also the matter of what was best for Calla. To the great disappointment of everyone, from the priests to Carolan's gammer, Calla had so far failed to get with child. Neither fervent prayers nor gifts to the church had solved the problem, and even a God-Help-Us, said before the altar with special dispensation from the Grand Manse, achieved nothing. At last Father Dorrit, who ruled over Laery's village and had married the young couple in the first place, had taken Calla aside and, after close questioning and a stern lecture about her holy duty, declared that the reason for her failure was perfectly obvious to anyone who had the brains they were born with. How could a lone woman in a household of menfolk be expected to keep her mind on womanly matters? In order to learn and prosper as she should, Calla needed to be among other women. And with her own mother dead, then the only decent place for her was under the roof of Carolan's mamaw and gammer, who could instruct her in the obligations proper to a young wife.

In some ways Laery was sad to see the couple go. Since Calla's arrival his house had never been cleaner nor his meals more appetizing. But he saw the virtues of a good business opportunity, and besides, he wasn't in the habit of arguing with Father Dorrit. So with Laery's blessing, and driving Laery's new cart with which he was to establish his trade, Carolan brought his bride home.

The village decided to hold a welcoming party. It was the gammer's notion, and she enlisted Father Borlagh's help in the organizing, hobbling determinedly on her blackthorn sticks to the priest's house. At first Father Borlagh wasn't inclined to cooperate; he was still harboring indignation at being excluded from the nuptials six months ago and felt that to be asked to pronounce a belated blessing on the marriage was adding insult to injury. But the gammer wore him down and at last he gave way; so on the day of Harvest Feast, the cracked bell in the steeple tower clanged its summons, and a cheerful procession wound its way along the path and into the church's embrace to see Carolan and Calla kneel together before Father Borlagh.

No one, least of all Carolan, gave a thought to Leah that day. In fact no one had given a thought to Leah for the best part of three months now. For a while after her Mammatti's death it had been different. People—and the womenfolk in particular—were curious to know how she would fare and what she would do, and on one historic day she had even ventured into the church during Sin-Forgiveness, sitting alone at the back and listening to the singing and the sermons. Father Borlagh had entertained brief hopes that Leah might at last be persuaded to see the light, but then he reasoned that, being her mother's daughter and a shameless, disobedient and unruly creature by nature, she was more likely to be bent on mischief than on devotion. So when the service was over, he withheld the words of encouragement he might otherwise have offered, and swept past her without so much as a glance.

Leah didn't come to church again but she was still seen about the village, usually on market days when she came to buy food. No one knew where she got her money, though speculation was rife; some said her Mammatti had left a long purse, some said Leah went robbing innocent households at night, while the great majority of the women agreed that Payment For Certain Favors must be easy enough for such a troll to come by and that Leah was a disgrace and should be driven away.

However, Leah stayed, and as time went by and she caused no trouble, the villagers learned to tolerate her. Curiosity began to wane; though there was a brief flurry of renewed interest when a small deputation went out one day to the house in the woods, to see

for themselves how the girl was living. They found only a patch of blackened ground where the house had stood, and Leah had obviously moved herself elsewhere. Intrigued, but not sufficiently to trouble to search for her, the visitors filled their hats and aprons with ripe but neglected vegetables from the overrun garden—for didn't the angels themselves weep at the sight of good food going to waste?—and went home.

Leah knew of the callers. She had seen them from her vantage point high in a nearby tree, and had watched as they poked about and muttered and chattered. She didn't care that they had taken the vegetables; indeed, she was greatly amused by the thought that the village would feed blithely tonight on crops which, in their turn, had been fed by Mammatti's corrupting corpse. She didn't need the food, for the woods provided plenty for anyone who knew where and how to look for it, and she had found enough coin under Mammatti's bed to buy whatever the woods didn't provide. She did not need the villagers either. She knew what they said about her when she strode in among them on market days, tossing her brazen hair defiantly while the womenfolk stared and whispered, and that was funny too, for it couldn't have been further from the truth. Leah could have earned money: she was pretty enough and wise enough. But she had other ideas. She was saving herself for one man, as she always had done, as she always would do. And when she heard that Carolan and his wife were returning to the district, she danced a silent, triumphant dance alone under the moon and returned to her crude shelter in an old, hollow oak tree, to make her plans.

SO, WHEN THE PROCESSION WENT INTO THE church for the blessing to be pronounced, Leah was ready. She had learned of the blessing, and the party that was to follow, through snatches of gossip overheard on market day, and she had secretly watched the tables being set out in the lane before Carolan's father's house to accommodate the flood of celebrants who would return from the church at noon. Now, emerging from concealment, she squinted at the sky and the climbing sun in a way that, had she only known it, was quite startlingly reminiscent of her Mammatti. An hour or more to go. The village was deserted. She had plenty of time.

Leah moved from her hiding place with all the nonchalance of a cat about to steal meat from the master's table with master none the wiser. And there was death in her heart and mayhem in her mind as she approached the first and largest table....

FIRST, THERE WAS TO BE FEASTING. THEN, WHEN NO MAN, WOMAN or child could accommodate another single mouthful of meat or bread or cake or blackberry pie, there would be dancing: a riot of fags, reels and strip-the-willows to shake down the food and make room for more. The solemn business of the day was over and done with, and even Father Borlagh, mellow with the beer and cider that flowed as copiously as water from the valley well, had unbuttoned the top three inches of his stiff vestments and was cracking jokes with the best of them.

Before the dancing began, though, there was one more formality to be observed. Carolan was no longer the callow boy who had left home to begin his apprenticeship. He was a man now in his own right; a man of place, a man of substance. So it was only right and fitting that he should lead the merry company in the traditional toast to good health, long life and the good guidance of God and his angels to make blessed saints of all present when their time came. Dutifully and gladly Carolan rose from his seat, his arm linked with the arm of his beloved wife, Calla, and in a gesture of mutual devotion, they drank deeply from each other's cups; the special cups that had been set aside, already filled, to await this moment.



And Carolan, the light and the joy and the love of Leah's life and existence, drank the poison that the dark, secret forest had yielded. The poison that Leah had distilled and created to make a widower of him and to free him to be, as he must, her true and only husband.

HE COULD DO NOTHING. THEY CARRIED HIM FIRST INTO his father's house, and when the women declared that he was beyond their help, they carried him to the church, where Father Borlagh absolved him of all his sins and commended him to his maker, though Carolan was no longer able to hear or see or know anything of the words that were said or the tears that were wept over his motionless, glassy-eyed body. And when at last it was over, and the stunned and helplessly shuddering widow was borne in the embrace of two strong men through the leather-studded door and down the path and under the frowning, indifferent gaze of the lych gate, which had seen so many of the dead, and so many of the bereaved, in its long and silent life, Leah crouched behind a headstone, curled like an aborted fetus that had never known a life independent of the womb. She was beyond weeping. The tears were there, but they were beyond her ability to shed. She was dust. Blood and flesh and bones; all dead. Sere soil where not one green shoot could grow. Horror and guilt, twin monsters, inseparable demons before which Father Borlagh himself would have thrown down the sword of righteousness and bowed his grizzled head, had their claws in her soul; and Leah was lost.

For Leah, who had loved Carolan with all the passion and jealousy and possessiveness of her yearning, twisted, fearsome heart, was mad. It was a quiet and strange and almost peaceful madness. It was in her eyes; it glowed from them as though they truly were the windows of her soul.

And those windows on her soul, to a dispassionate observer, might have suggested that she wasn't done with Carolan yet.

THEY BURIED HIM NEAR THE YEW TREE IN THE SOUTHWESTERLY SIDE of the graveyard; a position, Father Borlagh said, that a man could rightly be proud of. The whole village turned out for the wake and the interment that followed, and Laery came on his other cart, with Father Dorrit sitting beside him. At the graveside they all wept and said God-Help-Us and laid purple flowers on the newly turned soil, and they ignored the mason's spelling mistakes as they adorned the headstone, and they ignored the bristling between Father Borlagh and Father Dorrit, and when the last spadeful of earth was filled in and tamped down, they put their hats back on their heads and returned to Carolan's father's house for the drinking to begin in earnest.

Calla, they said, was bearing up well, all things considered. To be sure, she hadn't spoken a word all day and her face was as deathly white as the face of poor Carolan in his coffin, and her eyes looked like black holes burned into paper; but she was handing round the ale and the mead now and nodding her solemn thanks at the condolences. A pity, the older women said, that Carolan hadn't managed to get a child on her before he went to the angels, for a child was a great comfort to a woman in widowhood. But then on the other hand, perhaps it wasn't such a bad thing, for—and the good God forgive them with her man still warm in his grave, but it was true nonetheless—Calla was young and pretty. Without babbies clinging round her skirts she might yet have the chance for another husband, and good luck to her if she did.

Calla heard all they said, for in the confines of the small room it was impossible not to hear. She said nothing, as was her way. But when dusk came at last, and the gaffers and gammers began to nod and snore, and the women crooned to their fractious children, and the men, drunk enough now to forget the sad dignity of the occasion, were comfortable before the fire and talking of horses and dogs and gambling, she quietly slipped out of the house by the back way. The moon was up, a chilly, waning crescent in the sky, and it made a ghost of Calla with her black hair and black widow's weeds as she passed through the rickety, creaking gate toward the church, with

the slow, dragging, footsteps of a soul in anguish. They were kind, Carolan's people. They were doing their best for her. Even Father Borlagh had patted her hand in an awkward but well-meant way, a tear glittering in his eye as he tried to give her comfort. But Calla didn't want comfort. Maybe another day, far in the future, she would be glad of it. Now though, she chose to be with Carolan. She would sit beside him through the lonely night and sing to him as she used to do in happier times. And even if he couldn't hear her songs, the singing of them might ease her hurt just a little.

In the house another cask of ale had been broached, and the blacksmith's wife had prodded her husband in the ribs and told him to fetch out his fiddle, which he did with a sigh of resignation. The gaffers and gammers woke up at the first strains of music, and the company wavered their way through "Righteous Angels" and "Teach Us the Meaning of Misery"; two hymns which Father Borlagh considered suitable to the occasion and in which his powerful baritone voice led them. Then, with the formalities observed, the mood changed, and the blacksmith (who was into the spirit of the thing by now) tuned up for "All Among the Apples," which everyone knew and could roar out with gusto. A few of the more sober souls looked surreptitiously around for Calla but, not finding her, crossed themselves for forgiveness and prepared to bellow along with the best.

Then, as the fiddle played the first lively notes, a shriek from the deepest depths of hell split the night apart.

"Good God and all the saints and angels!" Father Borlagh leaped to his feet. "What in the name of a thousand yammering devils was that?"

He and Father Dorrit reached the door together, and there was a moment's confusion as both tried to shoulder the other out of the way and get through first. The door burst open, cool night air sucking heat and smoke and fumes out of the house like a blast from a furnace, and the two priests and the men who now crowded behind them fell back with yells of horror at the sight of a ghastly, spectral figure running at them out of the moonlight, arms flailing, mouth open and screaming like the legions of the damned.

"Demons!" the apparition screamed. "Red demons! Red demons! At his grace! At his GRACE-A-A-AVE!"

As the men leaped backward, Calla flung herself through the door and sprawled full-length on the rush matting, still flailing, still screaming. It took the blacksmith's wife and three other women to pin her thrashing limbs to the floor, and Father Dorrit hastily recited a Deliverance over her while Carolan's grandmother forced five drops of a nostrum she always carried in her sleeve between the girl's chattering teeth. They calmed Calla's body at last, but her mind was still in the grip of terror and all she would say, over and over again, was, "Red demons at his grace... red demons at his grace..."

There was, said Father Borlagh, only one thing to do. Were they not all God-fearing men and women, and with two priests of God's own company to lead them? Were they not all warriors on the side of the angels? Take up arms, said Father Borlagh, and we shall march to the graveyard and put the forces of evil to such a rout as hasn't been seen since the saints trounced the devils and condemned them to the outer dark!

There were uneasy mutterings at this brave rhetoric, but when Father Dorrit added his considerable voice to that of his rival, it was enough to cow them into submission. Better the wrath of demons than the wrath of two of God's own priests. So they took up whatever weapons they could find, from walking sticks to pots and pans and rolling pins and good, stout pewter tankards; and, leaving the gammers and the children to comfort Calla as best they could, a righteous army more than thirty strong marched out into the dark to confront the unholy invader.

At the churchyard, moon-shadows reached out long, thin fingers to embrace them. Father Borlagh and Father Dorrit sang another hymn and the army pressed on, through the lych gate, past the tower stark against the silent sky, under the frowning gaze of the yew tree, which rustled and whispered at them as though murmuring some dire secret.



There were no red demons at Carolan's grave. But the purple flowers were scattered like drops of blood, and the earth which the sexton had tamped so smoothly down had been disturbed, as though something had been digging there with clawed hands, striving to reach what lay below. And the headstone had been uprooted and left to lie like a loaf of mouldering, unleavened bread under the moon's indifferent stare.

Half a mile away, where the woods began their silent encroachment on the village, Leah knelt among the leaf mold, hidden by the low-hanging branches of the trees. She stared fixedly, unseeing toward the village, and the nails of her fingers where they gripped her upper arms were caked black with newly turned soil. Every now and then a great spasm shook her, a palsy of grief and rage that knew no limit and no end. She had failed. That creature, that false, usurping hoyden who called herself wife to Carolan, had dared to interfere, and Carolan still lay beyond Leah's reach. But she would have him. Leah swore it by God and saints and angels, by demons and unholy serpents, and by the mocking ghost of her own dead Mammatti, who had taught her the ways of the dark. Next time, next time, she would not fail. Next time she would have her love, her man, her true and rightful husband, in her arms again. And when she did, nothing would take him from her.



IT WAS ALL DONE IN THE RIGHT AND PROPER WAY. Father Borlagh was man enough to submerge his lingering resentments, and the next day he and Father Dorrit performed a ceremony of exorcism and protection over the restored grave of Carolan. The sun didn't choose to show its face and the observances were conducted amid a dreary, soaking drizzle; but when all was done, the two priests repaired to the house of Carolan's father and were well fed, so there was little cause for complaint.

Calla still lay as she had lain since last night, in the top room that was to have housed her marital bed, with Carolan's mother and grandmother constantly in attendance. She was awake and aware of her surroundings, but still all she would say was, "Red demons... red demons..." The beldame declared that this was only to be expected, for hadn't the poor widowed child seen enough to unhinge the most devout soul? Something must be done, she said. Something must be done, or the vile monster would come back as surely as night followed day.

Timidly, Carolan's mother suggested that Father Borlagh and Father Dorrit were surely doing all that could be expected; more, indeed, for their cloth granted them solemn powers that were denied to lesser men.

But the beldame, with a sniff and a meaningful glare in the direction of the churchyard, replied that priests and prayers and powers were all very well when it was an exorcism you wanted, or a laying on of hands. But when it came to deeds it was quite another matter. Deeds were the domain of women, and it was the women who would act now. They would watch, she said. Turn and turn about, by night and by day, at the place where poor Carolan had been laid to sleep in the arms of his holy maker. And when it returned, as it was certain to do, they would be ready.

Even in her distraught state, Carolan's mother couldn't fail to notice that where poor Calla had cried "*demons*" in the plural, the beldame said *It* in the singular. But she made no comment, for she had learned the beldame's ways long ago and would no more argue with her than with an angel bearing a fiery sword.

The other women, it transpired, were also disinclined to argue with the beldame. They didn't like what she proposed, but in the face of her fierce determination, they held their tongues and asked no more questions than Carolan's mother had done. Fathers Borlagh and Dorrit raised no objections either, and one or two uncharitable souls suggested that they were only too glad to have the matter taken out of their hands.

And so when darkness fell that night, nine women set out in grim and silent anticipation for the churchyard, with the beldame hobbling in the lead. The sky was clear and the moon riding high and cool above, her arc a light to guide them on their way. One by one, or two by two for the less courageous, they ranged themselves about the graveyard, each with a clear, star-glimmering view of the headstone restored to its place now above the spot where Carolan lay.

And as the midnight hour passed and the moon reached her zenith and thus the height of her power, the beldame's prayers were answered and Calla's red demon returned.

She was singing a song as she came, softly and under her breath but audible nonetheless. As if that wasn't sacrilege enough, she was also swinging a long-handled garden spade, slicing at the tops of churchyard flowers with the newly sharpened blade as she walked.

The spade had seen sterling service over the years. It had dug trenches for vegetables, larger holes for currant bushes and apple trees, and, latterly, a greater hole still for the corpse of Mammatti. Now though, Leah had a new purpose in mind for it. Now it would be the instrument by which she would be reunited with her love, her man, her true and only husband. Leah was quite, quite mad. But it was a pleasant madness now, for the rage had gone, and the guilt had faded, and the grief...well, the grief would not last. After tonight there would be cause for rejoicing instead, for she and Carolan would be one at last.

Leah smiled as she sang, and she skipped as she walked, for all the world as though she were strolling through the graveyard on a fine summer's morning with nothing more sinister in mind than to say a pious God-Help-Us at the church altar. From the shadow of trees and bushes and headstones, nine pairs of eyes watched her, and eight throats hissed in soft outrage through lattices of clamped fingers. Only the beldame was silent; though she smiled the cold, grim smile of vindication, with the wisdom of her great age and great experience she had known the truth. She knew, too, that her cohorts were watching her, and slightly but emphatically she shook her head, warning them to make no move. Not yet, the gesture said. Not yet.

First, the flowers went. Leah gathered them up in armfuls, wreaths and posies alike, flinging them aside to expose the bare earth of the grave, damp and loose still from the day's rain. Then the headstone. The beldame was greatly impressed: who would have thought that such a scrawny slip of a thing should have such strength in her? Over the stone went, with a heavy thud. Then Leah began to dig. Quick and eager as a terrier scenting a tantalizing rat, her hands wielded the spade and the soil flew in all directions. And Leah began to sing another song—a shrill, excited song of love and desire and longing; a song to Carolan that told him she was here, she was coming to him, breaking through to take him from his lonely bed and carry him home, where she would be his wife forevermore. Laughter bubbled between the song's eerie phrases; the spade flashed, the earth flew—

And the beldame raised her stick in the prearranged signal that told the women to leave their hiding places and close in.

When Carolan's gammer spoke her name in a tone like the wrath of God himself, Leah shrieked. The spade dropped from her hands into the deepening hole, and her head came up, face deadly white, eyes huge and round and staring. Nine figures formed a circle around her, a circle from which there was no escape. Nine faces glared back at her, vengeance glittering in their eyes. Nine mouths pronounced curses and anathemas, naming her blasphemer and desecrator and unholy serpent. And nine pairs of hands reached out—

"No!" Leah's voice was high-pitched and so strange, almost child-like, that it made them pause. "Oh no, oh, no!" She giggled. "You'll not touch me, you see! You can't touch me, you see! He's mine—Carolan's mine, just as he always was. And I've come from him now, I'll take him now, I'll take him home!" Didn't they understand? Fools, they were—they must be made to understand.

"Ignorant old women, what do you know?" she cried. "I can bring

*Continued on page 76*

*Their world is dead though their legend lives on. The Knights of the Round Table must now save Britain from another invader...Hitler.*

# THE HOUR OF THEIR NEED

BY AMY WOLF

*Illustration by Gary Freeman*

MELLIAGRAUNCE FELT A JOLT, LIKE striking the ground in full armor. A two-beat rhythm started in his neck, chest, and groin.

*"Did anyone bring the torch?"*

A hissing: caught by a close-up barrier, to come back hot on his lips. His breath.

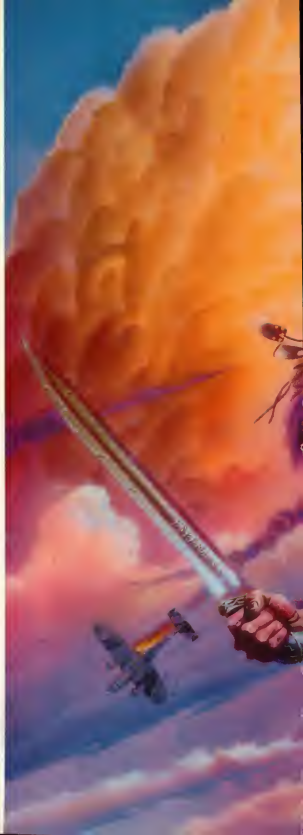
*"Daphne, did you hear the wireless last night? When Jack Warner says 'di-da-di-da'—"*

*"Oh, Uncle!"*

*"If only the Frogs had held Dunkirk, we wouldn't be huddled underground like moles!"*

*"Really, Bertram, moles don't huddle."*

A clicking, as of a vault being opened, but Mellia-graunce realized it was only his eyelids.





"So dull in the country, isn't it, Auntie? I do miss the shops and cinema, and dancing at the Savoy with soldiers."

"Dancing!" The man's voice. "No one danced in the Somme, I can tell you that!"

Melliagraunce heard the words, but only along the edges. His eyes focused onto white horizontal bands.

"—hard enough in the blackout, but with no petrol to be had—"

The bands resolved into welcome solidity, circling the length of his body. He was completely encased in stone.

"Mummy, may we hear 'It's That Man Again' on Thursday?"

"We'll see, dear. Help me with the tea things now."

Melliagraunce inspected his vertical coffin. His fingers, newly sensitive, ached as they scraped across limestone. He brought his hands

**B**ALLS!" HE YELLED TO THE CHAMBER, THROWING himself against shards. The stone ignored his touch: it would not take him back. Melliagraunce cried the tears of a man who knows that no one is listening. If life—daily life—was unfair, what of that granted against his will?

up to his face. The long tapered fingers shook slightly. They were his mother's hands.

"Be honorable in all things," she had told him. "To a true knight, death is preferable to shame."

"Yes, Mother," he had said, believing it.

"No, no, Betty, none for the pot. We've two ounces to last a week."

Food rationing. Melliagraunce nodded. Naughty old Adolph.

"But how wonderful to have chicken, and eggs too! In London, one simply can't find them." The younger woman's voice.

"Damned Channel bombing," said the man. "Shipping's a mess."

Melliagraunce gripped his head. He didn't feel quite himself. Still, he thought: I'm alive.

A shiver of heat looked down his stomach, seeping into his death wound. The two-beat rhythm pulsed its code: alive alive alive.

"Oh God," he said, and sank his forehead onto the rock.

SLEEP MUST HAVE COME, FOR HE OPENED HIS EYES IN A SECOND awakening. Dim light streaked the white bands of stone.

Melliagraunce rested his back against rock. He was happy enough to wait there, until he could die again.

The ground rumbled. Good, he thought, I won't have long to wait. It happened again, not violently, but in languid waves which were like a massage. A fissure cracked the length of the stone, admitting more dimmed light.

"No!" Melliagraunce shouted, placing his hands on parting rock. New fissures, jagged as lightning, aged, wrinkled, and killed the stone. A moment of silence, then thunder, and Melliagraunce stood over six rock petals at the far end of a cave. He saw tables, chairs, four bunks, and enough tinned biscuits to last out a blitz.

Melliagraunce looked down, feeling stiffer than a boy in first armor. He wore knee-high, black leather flying boots; a smart blue uniform stitched with gold wings; and a red silk polka-dot scarf. He touched his face—still his; same aquiline nose and underfed cheeks—but his hair no longer hid him: it was short and shrouded by a cap.

"Balls!" he yelled to the chamber, throwing himself against shards.

The stone ignored his touch: it would not take him back. Melliagraunce cried the tears of a man who knows that no one is listening. If life—daily life—was unfair, what of that granted against his will?

Report to Biggin Hill station, someone said. One Hundred-Fifty Squad at readiness. It was his own mind.

"I won't!" Melliagraunce shouted, and he sprinted from the cave into daylight. He pulled his cap down his face. It was dazzling, this light, born of summer in a pure cloudless sky, like that of his own country, Dummonia. He saw a red-brick house a quarter-league off, as big as his gray stone manor; and the men in the fields, with their wide-brimmed hats and steady gait—they gave him a sense of timelessness.

The pressure on his bladder was killing now; he unzipped his

trousers, relieving himself by a well.

"Hullo! Have you been shot down?" An echo came over the water and he hastily zipped up.

He stared as a blond girl ran toward him, in a uniform of her own: school sweater, strict black tie, and socks that traveled to the knee.

"Where's your plane then? Oh, you weren't flying! You've no Mae West or parachute." She pouted with such elegance that Melliagraunce nearly smiled. "Why are you in our fields? The nearest base is twenty miles off."

Melliagraunce didn't know what to say, until it was said for him. "Bad show! Went for a Burton in a ropey kite and had to hit the silk."

The girl giggled. "You sound like my brother Colin. He's a Hurricane pilot, you know."

"Hurribugs are a packet! Spits are it—even Jerry thinks so."

"Colin says the same thing about Spitfires."

Melliagraunce tried to smile, but his lips got stuck on his teeth. The bastards! They'd taken him from his rest, and now they were taking his voice. It was the last thing that belonged to him, and he wouldn't let them.

"What's your name?" The girl, motioning primly, led him out of the sun.

Melliagraunce fought the expected response. "Melliagraunce," he said.

"That's rather queer." The girl didn't seem that interested. My name's Betty. I've got a cousin Daphne; and my Mum; and my Dad, Bertram Mayhew. He used to be a banker."

Melliagraunce shook his head. If she'd been trained to beware of fifth columnists, the lesson hadn't taken. "What is this place? Where I've pranged, I mean." He cursed his tainted tongue.

"Oh, somewhere in southeast England."

"Hells bells!" So she knew enough to keep that quiet.

"What squad are you? Colin's in 32 at Biggin. I do wish I were with him. Mummy can be so awfully strict."

Melliagraunce readied his "Glorious 150's" speech. He looked at Betty. She had given him a bit of truth; he supposed he should give some back.

"I'm not in any squad at all. I'm a Knight of the Round Table and I've been dead for fourteen hundred years."

Betty stared at him. "You look well enough."

"Well, I'm not."

"Why?"

Melliagraunce sighed. Children could be so direct. "Because I've been through it once. I 'did my bit,' as you say, and my world still ended. That's the worst thing, you know—not giving up, because that's easy—but giving your all and having it still be meaningless. I can't do it again. I won't." Tears fell on his stitched gold wings.

Betty seemed flustered. "I've never seen a man cry before."

"I know; pip pip and that's a good chap and 'Go it, R.A.F.' [Royal Air Force]. He wiped his eyes with the polka-dot scarf. "I suppose it's an honor to be brought back. In truth, I wish I were dead."

"Sir Knight," said Betty, gravely. "I think you should talk to my Dad. He was a warrior once, and he might be able to help you."

"No—" Melliagraunce called, but Betty trotted off toward the red-brick house, her feet as fleet as a pony's.

"Balls!" he yelled, and ran back to the well. He cast off the things that weren't his: cap, tunic, scarf. He watched them disappear underwater, but didn't see cloth or silk; instead, he saw a sword, silver blade descending, jeweled haft breaking the surface, to be caught by a fair white hand...

Melliagraunce fled through barley fields, ignored by men who were harvesting. He tore through a gate into the woods, his hard boots blistering his feet.

The woods. He had always felt safe there, his soft green boots padding between birches. There had been no feeling of danger—no bad men, for Arthur had driven them out—only parties of knights, and his mother, reading to him of the saints. Melliagraunce had loved the woods as a retreat from his sun-drenched life; when the sun dimmed, he was left not with peace, but the dark sanctuary of the stone.

"You there! Halt! Let's see your identity card!"

Melliagraunce stopped on a short dirt road blockaded by an ancient forest. Before him were three Home Guards, armbands official over denim, helmets shadowing gray heads.

He tried to think his way out of it. "Say now, chaps, I've pranged nearby, and afraid the meat discs got lost. Rather fight Jerry than Dad's Army."

The guard who'd hailed him drew out a pistol. He had a steady hand.

"We've no reports of any incident. What's your squad?"

"One Hundred-Fifty Phantoms, sir!"

"Never heard of 'em. Let's have a name."

"Knight, sir."

"What Knight? Come on now, you a Tommy, or a Jerry?"

"I'm Tom Knight, sir." Melliagraunce liked his invention.

The other two guards looked grave, hoisting rifles older than they were. "Better come with us," said the leader, pointing his pistol and cocking it.

Melliagraunce didn't move. He knew what a gun could do; that it shouldn't be faced without armor. He shrugged. Maybe internment was best, far from everyone's finest hour.

Grandfather and his pistol advanced. Melliagraunce guessed they'd both seen action—in Mr. Mayhew's Somme.

"All right, Dad, keep your hair on. Adolf's still back in the Reich."

THE PRISON WHERE THEY TOOK HIM WAS small: a camouflaged shack in a nearby town, patrolled by Army brown jobs.

Melliagraunce glanced at a second cell catty-cornered from his. This is livable, he thought, slurping his portion of beans. He'd refuse to fight and be sent to a camp, like the Germans who had fled Hitler for England. Tyranny—the enemy—was

nothing if not democratic.

"You will excuse me for disturbing you."

Melliagraunce rose from his bunk. In the other cell stood a dark-haired man, his gray uniform spotless and pinned with an Iron Cross.

"One half of you is R.A.F., yes?"

Melliagraunce looked down at his trousers.

"Hauptmann Peter Hartmann, Jagdgeschwader 12. I tell you this since you are a pilot and have honor." His English was as polished as his boots.

Melliagraunce nodded at the Cross. "You must be a great ace."

"Fifty-two kills. Forty in the Battle of Britain."

Melliagraunce whistled. Hartmann was the equal of a Lancelot.

"Whom do I have the honor of addressing?"

The German's manners pleased Melliagraunce. He bowed. "Officer Pilot Tom Knight."

"Then you are an officer. I'm glad. To be interned with a sergeant would be a disgrace."

Melliagraunce understood. This man lived by the Code. "How did you come to be here? With such a record, I mean."

"Ha, my glorious career!" Hartmann linked black-gloved hands over iron bars. "I am forced to bail out over Sussex. To the surprise of a Mr. Bowes, I went through the roof of his privy. 'Excuse me, sir,' I said, 'I seem to have come from the shit into the shit!'"

Melliagraunce laughed. The sound surprised him.

"Pilot Officer, my presence here is, shall we say, expected. And yours?"

His directness reminded Melliagraunce of Betty. "I suppose one could say I'm an objector."

"Ah," Hartmann's face clouded. "You shouldn't be, Pilot Officer. Hitler will come. The invasion of England has been planned for a month. Of course, with Der Dicke in charge—"

"Who?"

"Goering, the corpulent fool. He's losing the war, telling Hitler we can defeat you in four days; that there are no Spitfires left—"

"Why follow then?"

"Honor, Pilot Officer! I love my country, not the Reich. I love to fly, not listen to speeches."

"Yes," Melliagraunce knew. The Code. Once, it had meant something.

"What good am I?" Hartmann asked him, coming closer to the bars.

"I'm sorry, old chap, I don't follow—" Melliagraunce hid behind British reserve.

"Without wings, I'm as good as dead! Without flight, I'm less than a man! The feeling of speed, that nothing can harm you behind metal—"

Melliagraunce saw himself on the jousting field, his greaved legs guiding his charger, the world sliding by as leisurely as a river, though he hurtled at full-speed.

"I know what it is to be grounded," he said.

"Knight, Thomas!" a sergeant bawled, banging into the prison. "Ye're outta here, mate. They come for ya from Biggin."

Melliagraunce didn't move as his cell door slammed opened. The sergeant's pig eyes narrowed, and he realized he had no choice.

"Pilot Officer."

Melliagraunce stopped before Hartmann's cell.

"I wish you to have this." Something clicked into Melliagraunce's palm—the smooth-edged Iron Cross. Air Marshal Dowding took care of it. He said to give you this."

That way, a part of me can still fly free."

The sergeant shadowed Melliagraunce as he stepped back into daylight.

"Officer Knight." An R.A.F. man awaited him—a real chiefy type. "Bit of a muddle with the Home Guard. Air Marshal Dowding took care of it. He said to give you this."

He handed over a brown-paper package, fastened crossways with string. Melliagraunce burst it open.

Beneath the paper was a toy: a wood model Spitfire.

MELLIAGRAUNCE WOKE TO A PERFECT DAY FOR FLYING: BLUE SKY, NO wind, with just an impress of cloud. He rose and walked through his safe place—the woods—hungry, but afraid to leave.

15 August 1940. Tom Knight knew the date. This was to be the real

Adlertag, not Goering's disaster of two days before. Melliagraunce wished he knew more about today, but his other self stayed silent. It was all very Code.

Like the R.A.F., the fools, who trusted him to report. They shouldn't trust a restarted heart; it never beat the same.

Melliagraunce sat on a rock in a clearing. Above him came a buzzing, Stukas. Junkers Ju 87 dive-bombers. Vulnerable to attack from the rear.

"Hey!" Melliagraunce shouted, as seven banked to the east. "I'm here! I'm right here!"

The planes droned heedlessly on.

There were many planes in the sky that day: they came to bomb everyone but him. Melliagraunce, from his rock, traced an invisible battle: screams of engines; bursts of flame and white vapor trails, a dragon's exhalations. By evening, it was over.

So much for the Big Day, the one they'd brought him back for. When he was younger—say fifteen—he'd have been first up in the sky. Now he'd be the first to laugh at that boy.

Melliagraunce got up. He didn't mean to. There was pressure inside his head; a beetle's buzz in his ears.

He ran. Over to a mound of leaves, where he pulled out the toy Spitfire. His long white fingers shook as he dashed it to the ground.

Spitfire. The toy was gone, but the fighter plane was there: Green camouflage over a steel-gray body; "bulls-eye" emblem on the fuselage, guarded by white initials: "S-M-K."

Melliagraunce stared at the plane. It seemed small—just twenty-nine feet. It was sleek, he had to admit—those oval wings, delicately rounded, unmarred by their Browning gun ports. Still, he hated it. "I'm not going!" Melliagraunce shouted, but he was: he seized a parachute and vest from the wing, mounting the plane from the left.

A few steps, some sliding, and he strapped himself into the cockpit. A brown leather helmet hung from the stick. Melliagraunce put it on; plugged in the R/T and oxygen.

"Balls!" he yelled, and tried not to press the starter switch. His bastard finger did it for him: the three-bladed propeller turned.

Melliagraunce released his hand-brake. He zig-zagged over the clearing, pushing his throttle forward. The Merlin engine answered with a defiant lion's roar.

Take-off, and ascension—Hartmann's dream, not his. Melliagraunce looked below him, seeing trees and fields break past. England was still so green.

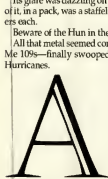
Tom Knight resumed control: flaps and undercarriage—up; bullet-proof canopy—down. Fine, Melliagraunce thought, this chap can go to crashland.

His harness pinched at his death wound. He gave the altimeter a glance: five thousand feet and climbing. He hauled back on the stick, slanting his nose to the sky. Ten thousand feet. Fifteen thousand. His hand turned up the oxy, and he felt it hiss in his mask. Nineteen thousand feet, heading straight for the sun at 350 miles per hour.

Its glare was dazzling on this still-light summer night, coming out of it, in a pack, was a staffel of nine Stukas, hemmed in by two fighters each.

Beware of the Hun in the sun.

All that metal seemed confused to find a lonely foe. The fighters—Me 109s—finally swooped, but were stopped by a whirlwind of Hurricanes.



STUKA LOOMED LARGE IN MELLIAGRAUNCE'S windscreen. He tried to slow, but Tom Knight wouldn't let him: "If you fly straight for five seconds, you'll never fly again." Obeying, he slid under the bomber with a half-roll, avoiding fierce black crosses; wheel spats that curled like claws.

Melliagraunce came so close he could see the rear gunner firing at him. He switched on his reflector sight and gave the fellow a burst. One of his tracers hit home, reconstructing the Stuka: it became a flaming sun.

Confirmed kill, he thought. Wouldn't they be pleased?

A Hurricane chappy flew by and saluted, then turned to join his squadmates. Melliagraunce saw his chance. He pushed on his stick and went into a dive, before Tom Knight could react. Negative G's reddened him out; when he came to, he had company: a yellow-nosed 109. Invert! Invert! Tom yelled, but Melliagraunce couldn't obey: his Merlin's carb had fouled, and the 109—fuel-injected—was master of the air.

Merlin, thought Melliagraunce, you should have stayed trapped in stone, like me.

The 109 was on him, letting loose with double cannon. It was like the pounding of horses' hooves; the crash of lance against plate.

Send me back, Melliagraunce asked, as shells exploded his front-mounted gas tank. Flames tore through the cockpit; over hands, legs, face. The dashboard dripped on his fingers and he heard himself scream through his mask.

Not like this. Melliagraunce reached for the hood but it stuck. I'm a knight, his own voice told him; a Knight of Arthur's Table. His charred hands slid back the hood and threw off his Sutton straps. He got his shoulders clear of the Spit; the slipstream took care of the rest of him.

Isn't this odd? he thought, I'm an unwinged thing in the sky. He couldn't see—his eyes had seared shut—but the sensation of falling was fine. He started to sing "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square." After a while they told him, it don't mean a thing if you don't pull that ring, and he did, his harness wrenching his body. This falling was so much more pleasant.

"Tallyho," said Melliagraunce, as he plopped into the Channel. He released his chute and blew through a tube, inflating his bulky Mae West.

Everything seemed to be burning. His face burned in the sun, the one that came out at night. "Black as the stone!" he yelled, and felt a great satisfaction. It would be nice to stay here forever, caressed by black churning water. Then he remembered he didn't like water; water was never his friend.

"Help! Help!" he yelled. His fear of being swallowed by blackness undid his lies about life.

He went under. It should have been hard, with his bosomy Mae West, but in fact, it was very easy. Relaxed for some reason, he floated to the bottom and saw a woman in white approaching. She didn't swim, but walked, her blond hair fanning behind her; her skin white as her eyes, which were flecked with triangles of blue.

She stared at him, and from her smile he caught a reflection of pity. He must have looked a mess.

She put up her arm and showed him something: leathery, belted—a scabbard. Empty. Where was the sword he had carried for Arthur, silver haft spinning in the mist, to be caught by the woman's white hand, then withdrawn beneath the waves. Excalibur was gone, even as Arthur lay dying; they'd all died, at Camlann, and heroes and effort meant nothing, surely the woman could see that?

But she didn't. She fastened the scabbard about his waist, straightened, then kissed him once on the lips.

Was it a kiss of peace or a kiss of death? Melliagraunce wondered, as he floated back to the surface. Compared with the cold of the Channel, the night air seemed warm on his face.

In the darkness, he heard a thrumming.

"That's one of ours, ain't it?"

"Can't be sure."

Rough voices, from a craft. "Say there mate, you a Tommy or a Jerry?"

Melliagraunce thought. I'm a knight. Without a sword. Le Chevalier Sans Epée.

"He's one of ours," said a seaman, and hauled him over the side.

"PILOT OFFICER KNIGHT?"

An R.A.F. man stared down at Melliagraunce, with the air of knowing his secrets. Intelligence.

"Yes?" Melliagraunce stared back from his hospital bed.

So much for his pleasant stay. He'd lain low for a month, but word



got around: this chap had more lives than a cat.

"I've brought you a uniform, sir. The Air Chief requests your presence."

Requests or demands? Melliagraunce thought, shrugging into a tunic.

He kept his talk to "yes" and "no" on the lorry ride from London. For eighteen straight miles, down a highway guarded by guns. He and his friend finally stopped at a place which stood watch like the Tower: Biggin Hill sector station.

"A miracle, this," said Intelligence, as they legged it over a runway. "Just two weeks past: shelters hit; Ops Room and planes on fire. Old Adolf's done us a favor—"

"By bombing London to bits?"

"Know your onions," Intelligence nodded. "Most of them still alive do."

They crossed the airfield boundary to a cemetery thronged with

drowned by a buzzing—of two Dornier 17s.

The bombers dove at full-throttle, ten machine guns rattling, "Flying Pencils" slim in the sky.

"Take cover!" Dowding yelled, not heeding his own advice. Melliagraunce hit the ground. Feet stamped around him, heavy boots and women's heels. The earth erupted in geysers—dirt and grass and debris—unloosed by errant bullets. Nice work to strafe a funeral.

Betty. Melliagraunce raised his head, and everything seemed to slow, as it had at the bottom of the Channel. He saw her, stockinged feet flying, lose hold of her mother's grip. Through a curtain of dirt she slid forward, rolling into an open grave. Colin's. She teetered for a moment on the edge, then was gone.

"Jesus." Melliagraunce's tears mixed with dirt. He couldn't allow this to happen. Brothers might lie in newly dug graves—boys, no more than eighteen—but this new crop, the children, should not have to lie there as well.

**J**ESUS." MELLIAGRAUNCE'S TEARS MIXED WITH DIRT.  
*He couldn't allow this to happen. Brothers might lie in newly dug graves—boys, no more than eighteen—but this new crop, the children, should not have to lie there as well. His world was dead—mist—but the Legend had somehow survived.*

civvies. Melliagraunce looked down. Gravestones formed neat rows, as if standing at a last attention. How many there are! he thought. Such a lot of deaths.

An R.A.F. chaplain came forward and unclasped a miniature Bible. Melliagraunce thought of his own chapel, candle-branched and smoky.

"If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me." Even there—"Melliagraunce's mind wandered. He focused on coffins poised by their graves like swimmers waiting to plunge.

"Just as Crusaders and knights of old—"

The coffins creaked in their harness.

"—these brave boys in blue, with their planes as armor; guns as lance; and the honor of Britain their shield—"

Melliagraunce heard "Go to it!" when the chaplain mentioned 'knights.' Someone said from the front, "He was a reg'lar Arthur, he was."

A man approached Melliagraunce, stiff in braided blue. "Sir Hugh Dowding, Air Chief Marshal. I trust you're feeling well?"

Melliagraunce said nothing, remembering Dowding's gift.

"You did well on the 15th, Knight. 15 September is tomorrow."

"What of it?"

"Only England, sir. That's all."

Melliagraunce turned away.

"I didn't ask you here, Knight. Your friend did—a girl."

Melliagraunce scanned the crowd. In the midst of black he saw Betty, dwarfed by a horrible hat. He stared at Dowding's thin face. "Colin?"

"Third coffin from my left. Not everyone shares your good fortune."

Melliagraunce couldn't be sure, but he thought he saw Dowding glance at his scabbard. "I'd hardly call it good," he said. "How can you know—?"

"I know enough," said Dowding, but his next words were

Knights. Of old. Well, he was an old and a new knight, protected by double armor. His world was dead—mist—but the Legend had somehow survived.

"It meant something," he said, and that was all he heard: not acknowledge, not shelling, not planes. What he'd done at Camlann had meant something.

To these people, who needed legends.

"I say, everyone, All Clear." Dowding, on his feet, acted as human siren. His voice was no more agitated than if he were ordering tea.

Melliagraunce rushed past him toward the lip of Colin's grave. He dropped on the ground and reached out to Betty, who clutched the coffin harness. Using all of his swordsman's strength, he pulled her back to the surface.

The 15th was tomorrow.

He would not spend it on the surface.

150 SQUAD'S DISPERSAL HUT WAS DEEP IN BIGGIN'S NORTH CAMP. Melliagraunce entered just before dawn to find eleven men seated by a stove. Some read paperback thrillers; others dozed to "Tuxedo Junction." They were a motley crew, this lot—in uniform, flight jackets, and pyjamas—but the illusion created was perfect. They looked like R.A.F. pilots.

"Hallo! It's Melliagraunce!" A fair-haired youth stood up, his voice high and pure.

"Galahad. Call me Hal. This is Tristram, or Sam; Percival—Percy; Ector—Rory; Agravaire—Aggy; Bedivere—Dickie; Lionel—Leo; Gareth—Garth; Tor—Tory; Bors—Boris; and Kay. We all reported straightaway when the summons came to our caves. They dispersed us, quite right. Bloody clever chaps."

Melliagraunce almost laughed. Galahad was still such a prig. "Melly, we're glad you've come." Red-haired Gareth spoke, his brogue undistilled Scots. Gawaine's younger brother.

"Pukka of you, old man." Bors, next to Galahad, extended a ban-

dated hand.

"Every pilot counts you know," said Tor.

Melliagrance walked to a table and poured some lukewarm tea.

"The others treat you all right?"

"Aye." Gawaine himself spoke from the back of the room. "New men come in all the time, some with a few hours' training, so we seem right as rain. We're from '13 Group,' you see; our Spits are 'hot off the line.' The rest, Dowding takes care of."

"Who is he?" asked Melliagrance, balancing his paper cup.

"He needs pilots is all we know."

Melliagrance nodded and bowed to Tristram, he of the fair isle. They could all use a little redemption.

"Pay attention, lad." Gareth took Percival aside. The grizzled

the cockpit was the painted word "ROGUE"; behind it, familiar white letters: "S-M-K."

"Sir Melliagrance, Knight," said Melliagrance.

He cowboied into his seat and the rigger went about fastening: harness-mask-R/T and oxy. "Sorry about the wait," said Melliagrance, shouting through his mask to be heard.

He took off not too badly for only his second time. Planes rose from every direction, foresting the sky. The whistle of Spits grew louder as his squad formed up into three-man vics, with Galahad in the lead.

Galahad's voice—pure as always—crackled on the R/T. "Phantom Red Leader, calling Sapper. Airborne. What height?"

Gawaine answered from the ground. "Angels 20. Five-hundred bandits over the coast. Vector 180."

**D**ONE THIS BEFORE, HE TOLD HIMSELF, AND  
thumbed his firing button. Smoke poured from the bomber's  
port engine, followed by a sheet of flame. The spot it had  
filled in the sky was empty. "Good show!" Percival's voice  
broke radio silence. "That's one Flying Pencil erased!"

yet—no more than twenty—tried to advise the young sprog. "Don't follow a 109 down; another one'll get you if you do."

"Get in close to Jerry as you can," said Kay, demonstrating with his hands.

Melliagrance smiled. "This squad. Is it any good?"

"Good! Come on now!" came the chorus.

"I'll have you know, Melly, we've the highest kill ratio going, and we've been up five times a day. For a month!" Bedivere sounded indignant.

"Shhh!"

A duty corporal came in, silencing the men. Melliagrance borrowed paper and pen and pretended to write home.

At daybreak, the corporal removed blackout shutters, flooding the hut with sunlight. Melliagrance turned toward a window. He had forgotten that it was summer.

10.00 a.m. The telephone bell sounded. Melliagrance saw a change in his squad: Agravaine's hands trembled; Tor put down his cup.

"Yes sir, I understand, sir. Right away." The corporal stared at the receiver, finally hanging it up. "Breakfast will be right over."

He was struck with a barrage of cushions.

11.00. The gramophone squeaked out "Don't You Ever Cry," as Churchill exhorted from the wireless. Melliagrance looked at the knights. None were as steady as Winnie. Each time they went up, they risked a second death.

11.05. "Yes, sir. Yes, sir." The corporal clicked on a microphone, activating the Tannoy. "Phantom Squadron, scramble—Phantom Squadron, scramble." His voice sounded composed.

Melliagrance ran with the others and seized a kit from the corner. In seconds he was outside, ignoring a loud silver bell.

"This way, ace!" Ector pointed to the tarmac, where Spits were dispersed in blast pens. Melliagrance, sprinting past him, realized he had no plane.

"Over here, sir! Over here!" Melliagrance followed a young man's voice, which led him to a three-person ground crew. "We've taken the liberty, sir. We've been waiting."

The armorer, hands still greasy, led him to a roaring Spit. Beneath

"Five-hundred! That's the whole bloody Luftwaffe!" Tristram sounded personally offended.

Galahad ignored him. "Check in, Red Section."

"Red Two," said Percival.

"Red Three," said Melliagrance, holding steady at Galahad's wing. As the four vics swung to the south, he formed part of a metal diamond.

Percival started to whistle "Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)."

"Put a sock in it," said Bedivere.

"Red Leader! Trade approaching Canterbury. Let's gain some height!"

"Message received, Sapper. Listening out."

Galahad arced up sharply, nearly standing on his tail, and Melliagrance did the same. As his head pressed back, he tensed. Fighting to die was one thing, but fighting to live required some effort.

"I say, it's a lovely view," Percival, the new sprog, thought he was a tourist on holiday.

Melliagrance looked in his rear-view mirror. He saw a small Canterbury Cathedral, twin spires outspread, like hands begging not to be bombed.

"Bogies, twelve o'clock high!" Ector yelled.

Galahad pushed to top speed. "All right, lads. Tallyho!"

Melliagrance followed him up, squinting against the glare.

Black dots grew larger—became recognizable shapes—and he realized that each German bomber had an escort of five 109s.

Beware of the Hun in the...

"Fatty's put up the whole flipping lot!" Lionel, young as Percival, enjoyed his R.A.F. cover.

"Cut the chatter!" Galahad ordered. "Line astern!"

Melliagrance stayed with him as the 109s peeled down. Galahad dropped his nose, leading the squad in a wide climbing turn. The Germans now buzzed below them.

"Stupid bastards!" Gareth yelled.

Melliagrance saw explosive shells coming from a 109's wings. He moved to switch on his gun sight, and discovered he'd already done

it. Tom Knight was looking out for him.

The sky clouded with vapor. Melliagraunce fought through it, trying to keep up with Calahad. But swastikas—on yellow-gray tails—forced him into a roll.

Damn. He'd never make a proper wingman. He kicked his rudder and turned to the right, searching around for prey. A Do 17 filled his windscreens, its fighters harassed by Hurricanes.

Done this before, he told himself, and thumbed his firing button. Smoke poured from the bomber's port engine, followed by a sheet of flame. The spot it had filled in the sky was empty.

"Good show!" Percival's voice broke radio silence. "That's one Flying Pencil erased!"

Melliagraunce tried to smile, but his helmet was drenched with sweat. Good luck like this couldn't hold.

A commotion stirred to his left. Percival took on a staffel of Heinkels, directing them back to France.

"Hey!" Melliagraunce saw something else: a 109's yellow nose. "Percival—Percy—your tail!"

Percival looked back, featureless, his headgear acting as helm. "DON'T DIVE!" Melliagraunce screamed, a phantom smell—his own burning flesh—nearly making him sick.

Too late. Melliagraunce went after the German but couldn't fix him in his sights; at the end, he saw Percival's Spit floating down like bits of discarded clothing.

"Damn!" Melliagraunce wrenched his control stick. He hadn't known Percival well, but both were sworn to the Table. He wouldn't let the German get away with it.

The 109 saw him coming and made a series of snaking turns. Not smart, to turn in front of a Spitfire. Melliagraunce popped off 1200 rounds, the recoil shaking his shoulders.

Old Yellow Nose snuck behind him and the air lit up with tracer. Melliagraunce tried a loop, coming out of it dizzy but alive.

The 109. There he was, the bastard, arse exposed, trying to go into a half-roll.

"Now!" Melliagraunce yelled to his guns, and he fired from two-hundred yards. The 109 went belly up, a fish that wouldn't float.

Melliagraunce yelled over engine noise. "Hal, we lost Percy, but I got the bugger who chopped him. Where are—?"

A thud, like being brained by steel. Noxious black smoke and the strong smell of glycol. "Where are you?!" Melliagraunce shouted, craning his neck around. He spotted his attacker—a lone 109—who'd tailed him as he'd tailed the other.

Don't follow a 109 down...another one'll get you if you do.

Right. Melliagraunce slid back his hood, tore off his straps, and bailed. This was getting to be old hat.

He pulled his ripcord and felt the wrench as his canopy unfurled. The gold hills of Kent awaited him, and a bath, and maybe a pint. All would have been lovely, except for one annoying thing: the 109, diving with him, getting ready to strafе.

Not Code. Melliagraunce thought; not Code at all. He wished that this German were Hermann, an opponent one could respect; a true Knight of the Air. Hartmann. Melliagraunce reached in his left trouser pocket and pulled out the Iron Cross. It had suffered a bit of a sea-change, but in essence was much the same.

THE GERMAN CAME CLOSER, SO CLOSE, Melliagraunce feared for his chute. He looked at the man in the cockpit: he was big and blond, and clenched an unlit cigar in his teeth.

The German pointed to the Cross and waved; Melliagraunce waved back. Their eyes met for a moment, and the 109 turned east, swooping out of sight.

Melliagraunce drifted in a quiet sky, the September sun at its apex. He hoped that the AA and Home Guard wouldn't take him for a Jerry.

No sign below of pitforks or guns. Maybe his luck had changed. He hit the ground hard and fell backward, his boots spraying up dirt. He saw that he lay in a garden, between the cabbages and the sprouts.

A man—dour-faced and ancient—came out of a country house. "Excuse me sir," he said, "but this happens to be private property."

MELLIAGRAUNCE WENT UP TWO MORE TIMES THAT DAY. AT 3.00, HE raced over London, playing skysweep to a band of Heinkels; at 6.00, he and his squad chased twenty 110s from Woolston.

Funny what a scabbard—and a toy or two—could do to the mighty Luftwaffe.

9.00 p.m. The Phantoms met at the White Hart in Brasted, all except Percival and Agravaïne. True to R.A.F. form, no mention was made of the fallen.

Melliagraunce raised his glass. Here's to you Percy; and you, Aggy. Again, you served as the Few. No man could ask for better.

"Shhh!" A Captain waved his cap for silence. From the wireless came the report: "One hundred eighty-five enemy aircraft shot down..."

Fours squads of Spits and Hurricanes doused one another with beer. Melliagraunce drained his glass. He'd added three to that score.

"It's all bosh you know."

Melliagraunce turned to see Dowding, who motioned him into a corner. "In truth, they lost fifty-six. No matter. Propaganda will make up the difference."

"You're a one-track man, aren't you?" Melliagraunce stared at the pale, pinched face.

"When I tried to follow two tracks, I'm afraid it ended badly."

"You mean Mordred, I suppose." Melliagraunce, rather drunk, decided to play his hunch.

"I mean Guinevere, son of my friend. It seems you've confused me with Arthur."

"Ah." Melliagraunce understood, which only confused him more.

"Where is he, Sir Hugh?"

"Look for the man with the walking stick. He leads the country still."

A queer way to talk about Winnie.

"Knight, let me tell you something." Dowding refused a drink. "In two days' time, Hitler will cancel this invasion. The Battle of Britain is over."

"Then you don't need us." Melliagraunce looked away. The thought of the stone seemed so cold.

"Not at present. But in future...one must be at constant readiness."

"Yes sir."

"We will meet again, Sans Epée. You have Lancelot's word on it."

IT DRIZZLED THE MORNING OF THE 16TH, WHEN THE PHANTOMS took off from Biggin. Only ten of them now, with Lionel and Gareth badly battered. They all needed to rest.

"Check in, Red Section."

"Red Three," said Melliagraunce.

"Red Four," said Bedivere.

"Four? There is no Red Four!" Calahad sounded offended.

"Lighten up, man. It's not the Grail!" Gawaine acted as his wingman.

"This is the last transmission of Phantom Squad. Angels 7. Listening out."

Melliagraunce banked away from the others, watching them slant toward cloud cover. He saw each man go through, green Spit merging with white, but none came out the other side.

Melliagraunce took the plunge. He raised his hood and ripped off his mask, exulting as the soft stuff touched his face. The hardness of stone no longer held him.

Below him was an island. An island on an island, fragrant and green, with 148 knights.

In a short space of time, he looked forward to seeing Lancelot there: and Arthur, with his walking stick...the sword to fit his scabbard. ♠

*Special acknowledgement to Richard Collier's The Few: Summer 1940, The Battle of Britain for his Luftwaffe anecdotes. Also to Norman Gelb's Scramble: A Narrative History of the Battle of Britain for his account of the pilot who landed on "private property."*

# RANDOM NOISE

CAROLYN IVES GILMAN

*Illustration by Web Bryant*

**F**OR TEN YEARS, KATE HAD COME AT LUNCH-time to the concrete plaza outside her office, to nibble carrot sticks out of a paper bag. Years ago, the university had paid some unkind architect to decorate the space with miniature trees. They stood in staggered lines, like teeth on a zipper, with round prison grates over their roots to let the rain in. In ten years they hadn't grown enough to endanger the neat concrete circles they were planted in. They looked genetically engineered to match the styrofoam trees in architects' models.

Kate sat on a concrete bench, hunched over her knees. Everything about her sagged a bit. Her face looked like it had once melted and flowed southward. Her thin shoulders slumped forward; her sweater was too big and the sleeves

kept falling down her arms, though she was constantly pushing them up. Her huge owl-glasses drooped onto her cheeks. She wore a calf-length skirt and tennis shoes.

The Biology Department had just turned her down for a tenure-track job.

When she looked up, masonry towers shadowed her—Life Sciences on one side, Physics on the other. A concrete grid of windows upon windows. And inside each one, people making words. She could almost see the words fluttering down like a ticktape snowfall. No wonder the trees didn't grow.

"Your problem is you won't lobby for it," Neil had warned her the week before.

"What does that mean?" she'd said. "Buy the committee chocolates?"

"Well, it wouldn't hurt to socialize a little. You know, join the human race. They want someone who'll fit in, a team

*This burnt-out, aging flower child has  
lost her ability to communicate with  
people. Now something in the forest is  
desperately trying to make  
contact with her.*



player. Not someone difficult."

"It's my work they should be looking at," Kate had said, a self-righteous edge in her voice.

Neil's voice had gone gentle. "Kate, no one understands your work. We don't speak Fortran."

"I don't use Fortran."

"It was just an expression. Have a heart—we're biologists. Bugs and bacteria we understand. All you ever talk is data fields and statistical error. We can't tell what it means."

"You've just never tried," she replied.

But when the hiring committee had asked her to tell them what her current project meant, she had gotten tangled up trying, since she wouldn't really know what it meant till she was finished with it, and maybe it didn't mean anything and maybe that was the whole point. Somehow, behind her back, all the words were changing shape, making faces at the committee, holding up two-fingered devil's horns behind her head. She looked at the blank faces before her, not wanting to appear as pathetically eager to please them as she

Good old Mother. Always able to talk around life's potholes. Since Kate's father had had the stroke, she meant. "Can I use it, then?"

"All by yourself?"

"No, I've got a lover," Kate said with heavy sarcasm.

"Oh, Kate. I wish I could do something."

Kate didn't scream. "You can. Send me the keys."

"But don't you have classes to teach?"

"It's May, Mother. I have the tail end of that Rockefeller grant so I can work on research over the summer."

Her mother had never quite accepted the fact that in academia people gave you money to do exactly what you wanted to do, that that was the way it worked.

She said dubiously. "The place is probably a mess. It won't be much of a vacation."

"It's not a vacation, Mother. It's work." In the end she got reams of advice on who to call to get the place opened up, and a promise to send the keys.

"How's Dad?" Kate said before hanging up.

## *Kate didn't relax until the road escaped She was seriously embarked upon adventure now, a graying said aloud to the road, "If I'm going to get old, I'm going to*

felt. So she scowled and told them to read her printouts. And when she left, they consigned her to the eternal limbo of associate professorship, the soft-money hell where even Dante never went.

She'd been hiding in the bathroom, trying not to cry, when two undergraduates had come in, talking about her. Two girls in frosted hair, floral tights, and leather jackets. They must have been her students, though she didn't know their names. She had no rapport with these creatures who seemed more exotic than tropical birds. One of them had said without malice, "Oh, you mean that old lady who talks to herself."

Kate had hidden in the stall till they were gone, her cheek pressed against the rough graffiti on the wooden door. Then she had leaned over the sink to peer at herself in the mirror. Old? At forty-one? She ran fingers down her cheek, watching the skin stretch. Had everyone noticed but her? It was like finding she had been walking around with food in her teeth or toilet paper stuck to her skirt. How long had people been turning away in embarrassment, not knowing how to let her know tactfully?

Burnt-out flower child, the mirror said to her. You never noticed that you'd stopped being rebellious and simply gotten strange.

It was friskier weather on the plaza, and students were careening by on roller blades, but under that firing-squad row of trees the winter seemed to linger. Kate looked at the yew bush beside her, crouched behind a metal railing. Wherever the plant had stuck out curious fingers beyond the bars, the grounds crew had lopped them off. Her fingers ached; she rubbed them.

It had been winter for ten years here. In all that time she hadn't seen a single spring. Modeled them in mathematics, yes. But not seen one.

That night she called her mother, standing before the mirror trying to cut her bangs with the desk shears.

"What's wrong?" her mother said.

"Nothing's wrong. Why do you always say that? Everything's great." She grimaced into the mirror. If she said anything else, her mother would think she wasn't happy. Her mother would never let the universe rest until everyone was happy. "I was just wondering if I could use the cabin."

"The cabin up north?"

"Right. You still own it, don't you?"

"Of course we do. But we haven't been there in two years."

"Oh, the same. He never changes."

Yes, that was the problem.

SHE SET OFF TO FIND SPRING IN HER OLD GREEN VOLVO NAMED THE Turing Machine. It had vinyl bench seats, a floppy clutch, and a stick-shift that made a noise like a bulldozer in heat. Once she ground it into third, she leaned forward over the wheel in her oversized, cable-knit sweater, ready for some serious driving. In the rear-view mirror the neanthabella palm bobbed atop a heap of books and clothes, and the high-strung asparagus fern dropped panicky little leaves into her disk drives.

She took the freeway through the eternal tangle of construction downtown. Kamikaze trucks barreled along between concrete dividers that narrowed the road into a high-speed slalom run. Along the shoulder the state had planted trees to absorb the fumes. They looked stunted, pores choked with lead-poisoned dust. Kate didn't relax until the road escaped into open farmland. She was seriously embarked upon adventure now, a graying gypsy in search of magic.

She said aloud to the road, "If I'm going to get old, I'm going to do it as a cool!"

Freedom was her tailwind. She felt ready for anything—to climb the Himalayas, tame cobras, run with the reindeer. She would return to the roots of being, to elemental nature. She would cross the barrier that separates humankind from earth, and humans from each other.

Two hours later when she left the freeway, the hills were covered with birch, aspen, and spruce—the second growth where cathedral forests of white and Norway pine had once stood. It had taken only about twenty years for nineteenth-century loggers to deforest the entire northern part of the state. When Kate had first heard of that vast reaping of trees, she had wanted to model its effects on climate, groundwater, and erosion. She had failed for lack of data. It was literally unimaginable now.

The road into Maqua was lined with prefab houses hidden back in the scrubby pines, each with its satellite dish and pickup truck. The landscape looked a little inadvertent, as if the locals had stopped paying attention to it, until they woke up one morning to find their trailer parks and pastures turned into forest again.

Country people were supposed to be friendly. Kate stopped at the Coffee Cup Cafe on First Street, full of sanguine expectation. From



her red vinyl booth, she watched the burly man in olive-green overalls joking with the waitress, and the round-faced women in polyester pants. In Maqua, she resolved, she would connect with others in a way she'd never been able to do at the university. And they would let her belong.

The waitress came up to her table. "Pie, dear?" Kate stiffened. She was no one's dear. "No," she mumbled.

The waitress slapped the check onto the table, and Kate left without another word.

She turned the Turing Machine onto the county road. Her parents' property bordered on the national forest. It was the perfect neighbor, her father had always said—no one to get along with.

The driveway was littered with fallen branches. She left the car out by the road and walked in. It was still early spring up here; the air had the bite of a lemon. The cabin was nestled down by the lake, looking overgrown. When she let herself in, the musty smell of long-stored memories greeted her.

Inside, the walls were knotty pine; the furnishings, 1930s Sears

*into open farmland.  
gypsy in search of magic. She  
do it as a coot!"*

Roebuck. The living room was cluttered with cobwebby mementoes of her parents' lives—a trophy given to her father by his students, Central High Class of '62; faded photos of a trip to New England, with a pebble picked up on Emerson's grave. There was the armchair where her father had sat rereading *Walden* every summer; here his stack of faded books, waiting for him to return.

Blinking away sudden tears, Kate peered out the small, dusty window panes into the front yard. She could almost see there the leggy, spectacled bookworm she had been, swinging in the hammock between two pines. "Sprout," he'd called her, and taught her all the things of the forest floor, the mountain dogwood and fiddlehead ferns and jack-in-the-pulpits. He'd read her *Dr. Doolittle* sitting in that chair, and she had dreamed that some day she too would speak the language of the animals.

Time had not passed here—the house still belonged to other days. Days before the massive hemorrhage had struck him mute, and yet not killed him. It would have been easier if he had died; then they all could have mourned him. Now he wasn't gone, and yet he was. His body still lived, but all lines of communication into it were snapped. For two years Kate had longed for the power to invent a serum that would let her hear the words trapped in his brain. Some universal code to decipher the things people couldn't say.

THE PLANTS WENT OUT ON THE PORCH. THE EXTRA BEDROOM SHE transformed into a computer cave festooned with vines of cable and extension cord. Everything about the cabin was dissolving a little, losing the hard edge between artificial and natural. Mice had nibbled the insulation off some of the wiring, causing the electricity to have odd moods. One could never predict what color the water would be, and the pipes groaned as if they resented being disturbed. When she picked up the phone, she could hear ghostly conversations on the line, not quite there enough to distinguish words.

She had brought a mound of data collected over the past three years—growing seasons and plant distributions and dieoffs, water tables and soil chemistry, from which she hoped to glean some hint of systemic ecological change. It was the project she had been counting on to earn her that full professorship somewhere. Now she would have to write the article of the decade. Her back was to the wall of dwindling time.

At first she spent the daytime hours at the computer, devising filters to sift for pattern in a drift of data points. By evening, she would sit at the kitchen table playing solitaire. Some days, when the patterns proved elusive, she felt a visceral unease, like the touch of mortality. Perhaps she would never make sense of the data. Perhaps there was no sense to be made. On those nights, she would huddle under the kitchen light, feeling chaos pressing close outside. Random data: perhaps that's all life was. Just a blur of white noise.

She began to keep track of her wins and losses at solitaire, in order to plot whether they were randomly distributed.

Once a week she went into town for groceries and to pick up the packages from Land's End that her mother sent, full of baggy, practical clothes. She developed a little set of chaos-defying rituals. She always stopped at Ed's Bait and Bottle to look into the gurgling plastic tanks of minnows; when she waved her hand above them the fish would dart about in school formation. She knew she could program cellular automata in her computer to do the same, creating patterns mathematically indistinguishable from those of life. When she left, the shop owners would follow her with their eyes.

Gradually, she began to go on long walks through the forest. Exposed only to cathode rays, she had begun to feel colorless, like some tortured gourmet vegetable raised without benefit of sun.

When the Fourth of July came, the citizens of Maqua tied red, white, and blue balloons to the light poles and taped mimeographed picnic posters in the shop windows. That morning Kate went in swimming, and came out dripping to lie on the lawn with the grass prickling her back. Without her glasses, the world was an abstraction: a dancing pattern of light and dark. She looked at the big cottonwood leaning out over the lake. The sunlight on its leaves made perfectly round dots on her retinas. As a gust of breeze blew past, they flashed and twinkled, an elaborate system of sunlit semaphores.

The pattern was hypnotizing. Staring at it, she felt for an instant an exhilarating sense that the world all around her glistened like tinsel.

She slipped on her glasses, the scene came into focus, and the pattern disappeared. Curious, she took her glasses off. The world was abstracted again, and pattern jumped out of it. There, hidden by complexity. It was there.

There had to be a way of replicating the observation. A videotape, computer processed, could reduce the scene before her to a graphic abstraction. Each pixel would be a data cell; it would be easy to analyse whether the pattern of their flashing was random or ordered.

It was the type of thing only a coot would do.

"HELLO?"

"Kate! It's Neil. Where on earth are you?"

"Right here," she said. The connection was bad; she could barely hear him. She plugged her right ear, though there was no noise.

"I had to call your mother to get the number. Are you OK?"

"Of course I am," she said.

"Why did you leave without telling anyone?"

"There was no one who would care."

"Jeez, Kate. Thanks a lot."

She realized she had said something wrong, and groped for words to set it right. All she came up with was, "How's Laura?"

"She's fine. I've been trying to get through to you for a day and a half. Did you have the phone off the hook?"

"No, I've been on-line a lot."

"Doing what?"

She said warmly, "Something really exciting. Neil. I can't tell you till I get the evidence; you'd say I was crazy."

"Try me."

"No, I have to wait till I know what I'm going to find."

"All right, be that way. Did you hear about the budget cuts?"

"No. What budget cuts?"

"At the university. It's all over the papers. Don't you get the news up there?"

"No. I'm a hermit now."

He laughed. "You always have been."

She felt a twinge of annoyance at him. "This connection is really

bad, Neil. Why don't you call back later?"

When she hung up, she immediately felt sorry and decided to call back. It had been good to hear a voice, any voice. She went into the computer room to find her address book. The screen was as she had left it, flashing with an intricate checkerboard of light and dark. She stopped to look, elated by her achievement.

It was the electronic abstraction of a tree. It had changed in its translation from videotape into diagram; no one would have taken it for a tree. It looked like a pattern of square tiles, changing in light values as the sequence ran. The impression of order was strong.

She gazed at it, entranced, while the room grew dark.

WHAT WAS HARD TO COME BY WAS THE ANALYTICAL SOFTWARE. HER on-line search led her deep into databases she had never accessed, ones dealing with cryptography and information theory. She posted queries on bulletin boards and received screens of advice from fellow electronic travelers with on-line IDs like CYBERDUDE and CUBEROOT.

Something in the forest was trying to communicate with her. Deciphering it was a matter of sifting the signal from the noise. It was done every day by astronomers reconstructing galaxies from a smat-

ter of what it wasn't restricted to trees? What if language was built into the structure of all things, from the dancing DNA to the feedback systems of the biosphere? Perhaps there could be no information without language. It might be the most common thing in the universe.

And then, it might not. The tenure article was heaped in boxes in a corner of the room now. All the time she didn't spend at the computer, she walked through the woods, watching the shadows on the trunks and the fractal patterns of leaves against the sky. It was there, always on the edge of perception. The entire world was immanent with meaning.

SHE SHOWED NEIL THE PROCESSED VIDEO ON THE COMPUTER IN HIS office. The room was only a cinderblock cubicle in the Life Sciences tower, but he had covered the walls with stuffed animal heads and Far Side cartoons. He stood there, hands in his pockets, looking slightly seedy, slightly tweedy.

"What is it?" he said blankly.

"It's a code." She told him then, so excited she could barely contain herself. It came out backwards, and he was puzzled for a long time. When he finally understood, he took her down to the underground cafeteria for coffee. There were trees silkscreened on the wall.

*Every tree she looked at seemed to be sig-  
aspens and poplars flashed with hyperactive quickness, a tele  
fluttered like bright signal flags. There was a desperation in*

tering of photons, by radar operators and communication satellites. As she processed and reprocessed, a ghostly code began to appear. It was like the shadows that flit across the room at the edge of vision—gone if you looked at it straight on.

On a strange intuition she phoned the linguistics department, reaching a professor she'd never heard of. She asked, "Has anyone done work on how to distinguish a linguistic pattern of information from a non-linguistic one?"

He didn't understand at first; he referred her to someone who was working on Mayan texts.

"But we know that's a language," Kate objected. "I've got a code that may or may not be linguistic."

"You mean you don't know if it's natural or manmade?" he asked.

"Not exactly."

"Sounds to me like that's the place to start. If it's human, it might be linguistic. If it's natural, it's not."

Only it wasn't that simple. Kate was sure of it. At first she had seen the pattern only when abstracted—blurred in the videotape, digitized in the computer. Now she saw it as she rowed along the shoreline, or tramped the empty deer paths.

Every species was different, like a dialect. Maple leaves were two-toned—white underneath, dark on top—full of double meaning, fork-tongued against the sky. Pine needles shone with an intricate sophistry, subtle and dense. The poplars and birch were gossipy trees. At first Kate could not figure out the oaks; though their leaves were reflective as any, they seemed not to flutter in the wind. At last she realized the problem was in her angle of observation; the leaves would flash all right, but only when viewed from above. Oaks, it seemed, spoke only to God.

She called her mother. "There's something I'd really like to tell Dad, something I've found out. If you just held the phone to his ear and I said it, do you think he'd understand?" There was a long silence. "Mother?"

"No, Kate, I don't think so."

She hung up with a sharp ache inside. The only person she'd ever wanted to impress, and she couldn't tell him what she'd done.

"Kate," he said carefully. That meant something, she thought; Neil was never careful. She had gotten very good at noticing patterns recently. He said, "You've done some first-class work and I really respect you. But this is utterly goofy."

He was so tactful. "Thanks," she answered.

"Oh come on, don't be like that. What did you expect me to say?"

"I thought you might have an open mind. You know, like scientists are supposed to have." And friends, she almost added, but stopped, uncertain whether he would be offended.

"Kate, you're asking me to believe in talking trees."

"You saw the evidence."

"That wasn't evidence. You're projecting what you want to see onto the data. You want meaning, so you see it."

She couldn't answer, so she got up to leave. He caught her arm, saying, "Calm down, Kate. Just sit still a second."

She sat again, sideways in the chair this time, staring at the floor. She pushed her glasses up her nose.

"What else did you do over the summer?" he asked.

"Nothing. I thought this was too important."

"Did you see a movie? Go to the mall? Get out at all?" He sighed at her blank look. "Why don't you come over to our house for supper?"

"This isn't about me, Neil. It's a genuine phenomenon."

"There's no mechanism for it, Kate! Trees don't have brains."

"Not brains like ours, not hierarchical brains. Maybe other forms of life haven't sequestered their intelligence off into a single organ. Maybe their intelligence is suffused throughout their cellular structure. Maybe they are brains."

He started humming the *Twilight Zone* theme. Angrily, she said, "I'm trying to explain the evidence."

"Kate," Neil said gently, "if you want anyone to believe this, you'll have to have a watertight case. No phony data, no sloppy methodology, no woo-woo analysis."

That time she did leave. As she neared her office, her feet scuffed slower in weary dejection. She could already hear the voices, excluding her from their conversation. Kate's been talking to trees. What do they say, Kate?

She sat in her office looking at the pattern playing on her computer screen. It was there. And it was beautiful, tantalizing in its almost-meaning.

That day she went out through the concrete plaza, under the double line of trees. They didn't have the exuberance of the wild forest trees she had grown used to. City trees. She knew, without even having to investigate, that they had lost their language. Or perhaps they still talked a kind of pidgin—barely a grammar, no conjugations or declensions left. They wouldn't whisper sly comments behind passers' backs, or wink innuendoes. Humankind had taken and assimilated them—educated and employed them, till they came out modern, acculturated, and American.

She felt winter in the air.

WHEN SHE PICKED UP HER MAIL IN THE DEPARTMENT OFFICE TWO days later, there was a Post-It note on her box from the department chair saying, "See me."

He was unusually warm and interested in what she was doing. She knew instantly that she was going to be fired.

"You know about the budget cuts," he said. "They've hit us pretty hard. We're going to have to cut three positions. I'm sorry, Kate, but

*naling at her. The graphic tattoo; the maple leaves them, a need to communicate.*

yours is one."

"What about my classes?" Kate asked numbly.

"We'll have to distribute them among the regular faculty. We'll keep your name on the call-back list, of course. We'll get in touch with you when things look up."

As he said it, she knew they wouldn't. There were messages everywhere, if you just knew how to see them.

The city was trimming trees on the street where she had parked the Turing Machine, carving them into contorted shapes to let a power line through. Kate stood and watched the wounds weeping sap.

She drove north under a sky full of clouds heavy-bellied with autumn rain. On the roads, logging trucks and rusty pickups had replaced the tourists' airbrushed RVs. The Dairy Queens and agate shops were boarded up. The lakeside cabins looked like they had run out of color after a long summer of looking cheery. The smell of wood smoke permeated the air.

That night as she lay in bed listening to the blustery wind in the leaves outside, she felt again that she was in the midst of a vast conversation.

Autumn was in the air. Soon the world would become mute. She roamed the woods collecting videotapes to keep her through a winter's worth of silence. Every tree she looked at seemed to be signaling at her. The aspens and poplars flashed with hyperactive quickness, a telegraphic tattoo; the maple leaves fluttered like bright signal flags. There was a desperation in them, a need to communicate.

On a morning in October she woke to the sound of chain saws. She drove down the road to see what was going on, and soon found the rutted, bark-strewn logging road leading into the national forest. She tried to walk in, but the mud was too deep.

"Oh, they're clear-cutting that whole section," the woman in the post office told her. "They'll leave a strip along the lake so the tourists will never know."

"But it's a national forest!" Kate said. The woman eyed her as if suspecting her of environmentalism.

"That's what the Forest Service is for, dear," she said. "It's part of the Agriculture Department, you know. Those trees are crops.

They're going to replant the area with genetically improved pines."

Rows on rows of identical trees, marching in lockstep over scrubby hills. Kate went back to her car and sat behind the wheel swearing aloud, not even caring that her window was open and the man in the pickup next to her was looking.

As she sped back along the dirt road, the stones clacking against the car's frame, she raged to herself. Human beings were creating a mute world. An obedient world that wouldn't talk back. They didn't want to hear, like she did. They wanted to cut off all voices but their own.

When she reached home, she looked up the number of the Sierra Club, then stood with the telephone in her hand, listening to the blank drone of the dial tone. What could she say? Trees were chopped down every day; it was scarcely a scandal.

She hung up without dialing and sat at the kitchen table, cluttered now with unpaid bills. Last month's checks had all bounced. She tried to concentrate on that, but the distant chain saws whined, maddening mosquito voices in her mind. Every hour an inflection would perish. A week's work, and a dialect would have rolled down the road to the pulp mill.

She went into her office and loaded the word processor. "Chaotic Attractors in Vegetation Micropatterning," she typed in. That was good. All she had to do was find a language to make people believe it. A language of cool detachment, dry and scrupulous. She could say she had found an inexplicable pattern, and back it up with a blizzard of graphs and numbers. Draw no conclusions. Then, bit by bit, reveal that the pattern had a statistical resemblance to linguistic codes. Perhaps make a cautious comment about the human predisposition toward language having precursors in nature. No intuitions, no leaps from fact to faith. As long as she said it their way, they might believe.

She worked on the article all day. And when she read it through the next morning, she found it said nothing that would save a single tree. She wiped the whole thing out in a sweeping delete.

She dialed Neil's number. He picked it up on the first ring, saying, "Yup?"

"Neil, it's me."

"Oh, Kate. I've got a class in five minutes. What is it?"

"They're cutting down my trees!"

"Who? On your property?"

"No. In the national forest. They have a language, Neil! I don't know yet what they're saying; I've been listening, but I don't understand. I need more time." Suddenly, she was crying. "I need to talk to them, Neil. I can't let someone kill my trees."

Neil's voice was oddly calm. "Kate, don't worry, just relax. Is anyone there with you?"

It was then that words left her. Tens of thousands of words in her brain, and not a one came to her defense. She tried to scream, but there was no sound.

She put the phone down and wandered out into the living room. Neil's voice was still coming out of the receiver, high and tinny. She left the house, walking toward the sound of chain saws.

The bare-branched forest swayed around her. Fallen leaves crunched underfoot; she was walking on dead words.

It was forty-five minutes before she came to the edge of the cutting. She stood there, looking down the empty slope of stumps, dark soil churned up by wheels, a landscape barren as a devastated brain. At the base of the hill half a mile away was a flatbed truck waiting for a load. She could hear a tractor engine somewhere.

Mile upon mile of noisy silence around her. It stretched beyond the cutover, beyond the highway, wrapping the world in a random static of words no message could penetrate. All her desperate, lonely signals had disappeared into that noise. No one was listening; no one ever would.

A yellow machine was crossing the clearing, two logs gripped in its jaws. She tried to scream at it, but her voice only creaked softly in the wind. She couldn't run toward it, or away; her feet were rooted to the forest floor far below. She raised her hands to the sky and her thousand fingers strained the clouds. Blind, she clasped hands with all the beings around her. And for the barest moment, the world was full of language. ♦

*Are we ever ready to see a parent die? The haunting alternative  
can be just too much to bear.*

# BREEDING LILACS

BY DANIEL MARCUS

*Illustration by Alfred Kamajian*

*"April is the cruellest month, breeding  
lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain."*

—T.S. Eliot

THE NIGHT BEFORE HER father came back, Laura dreamt of his death. It was morning, and the light coming in through the living room window had the harsh, unforgiving quality of December in Manhattan. Shadows were thrown into sharp relief, and fat motes of dust drifted in lazy random motion through the wide, bright swaths of sunlight.

The phone rang. Her mother looked up, her face haggard and drawn. Where it was illuminated, her skin had an unhealthy, yellowish cast. She looked very frightened.

The phone rang again. No one moved.

Laura looked over at her brother, John, and for an instant, she missed desperately the easy rapport they had shared as children. His eyes slid over hers like oil on glass. No one moved.

A third ring.  
"Christ, I'll get it."

Katy, her mother's sister, pushed herself up off the couch and hurried into the kitchen. Laura and her brother followed. Her mother stayed behind in the living room, staring out the window at the jumbled, snaggle-toothed skyline.

Katy picked up the phone in the middle of the fourth ring and held it to her ear.

"Yes?"

She was silent, listening. She closed her



eyes and, without speaking, replaced the phone on the hook.

"Tommy's gone," she said.

There was a noise from the living room—a sharp intake of breath, not quite a sob. Laura and her brother still couldn't look at each other. She felt a rushing sensation, as if she were moving at great speed, wind whipping past her face. Katy's hand rested on her cheek like a dry, paper wing.

LAURA AWOKE FEELING DISORIENTED AND UPSET, the dream-moment on her consciousness like a weight. She made her way through the tiny hallway into the kitchen, negotiating by memory the clutter of canvases stretched on wooden frames. Some were blank, others were alive with shape and color. She had a gallery opening in three weeks, and she wasn't ready. Not at all.

It was an odd little apartment, even for New York. Three rooms connected to form a "U," so that to get from the bedroom to the living room you had to go through the kitchen. The rooms were long and narrow, with elaborate deco embellishments on all the moldings and fixtures. If you leaned just right out the living room window, you could get a great view of Central Park. The pipes made horrible banging sounds at all hours of the day and night and there were mice, but no roaches. She loved it.

She got some coffee beans out of the refrigerator and was about to measure them into the grinder when she glanced into the living room and saw her father stretched out on the couch, one arm dangling, brushing the floor. She dropped the bag of beans, scattering them across the linoleum. She took a flustered step forward.

"But, you're..." She couldn't quite bring herself to say "dead"—it sounded Gothic and absurd.

He looked much as he had in the weeks before his death, when the cancer had all but consumed him from within. The skin of his face was stretched across the bones of his skull like parchment; his eyes glittered from within sunken hollows like the pilot lights on some infernal machine. She was reminded of pictures she had seen of concentration camp inmates. Buchenwald, Treblinka, Dachau—the images of horror the names evoked seemed remote and distant compared to those last weeks of endless bedside vigil, waiting. The death watch, she had called it.

I can't deal with this, she thought. This isn't happening.

Survival instinct took over; her mind simply shut down. She swept up the beans and threw them away, dressed quickly, and left for work. She bought an orange drink and a cheese danish at the Nedicks in the Forty-Second Street station and stood there, eating, watching the crowds of people sweep past her. She would pick out a face and study it for a while as it bobbed up and down in the river of flesh and trenchcoats, until she lost it, and she would pick another. Sometimes the same face resurfaced, and she felt a small surge of joy. Her thoughts kept returning to the figure lying on her couch and skittering away.

This is denial, she thought.

When she got to the office, she threw herself into her work with a manic intensity. She had a pitch to upper management scheduled for the following week and, while the main ideas were sketched out, there was still a lot of detail work to do. It was completely absorbing and she wrapped it around herself like an oversized sweater.

"Working in advertising," she had once told someone, "is like being a whore, but you don't have quite as much self-respect."

She actually enjoyed it more than she cared to admit. She considered her painting to be her real work, but she took an almost guilty pleasure in the honing of her craft as a marketable commodity. The

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machine.*

money wasn't bad, either.

She worked straight through lunch and it wasn't until three o'clock that she took a break, realizing that she was hungry and a little dizzy. She left the office and walked up Lexington Avenue, stopping to buy a hot dog and a Coke from a street vendor. The cool autumn breeze was a welcome relief from the stale, climate-controlled air of the office. The morning seemed very distant.

Aberration, she thought. Apparition. She repeated the words to herself like a mantra. Aberration. Apparition. She was certain that he would be gone when she returned. As she walked, eating her hot dog, she thought of the day he died.

A BLEAK PANDEMONIUM DESCENDED ON THE apartment after the news arrived. Arrangements with the hospital, the funeral home, endless phone calls, a steady procession of relatives bearing trays of food. She had a terrible argument with her brother.

"We shouldn't have let him die in that crummy hospital," she screamed at him. "He wanted to come home. We should have let him come home."

"Mt. Sinai is a good hospital," he said. "He had the best of care. He was sedated, he was comfortable. We just don't have the facilities here...." His voice trailed off.

She slapped him, hard. His glasses flew across the room and he stood there, shocked, an angry welt rising on his cheek.

"You're crazy," he said. "You're really crazy."

She raised her hand to strike him again, and

Katy grabbed her wrist. She looked at John and tilted her head toward the door. He retrieved his glasses and stalked out of the room.

"Take it easy," she said, putting both hands on Laura's shoulders. Laura realized that her teeth were clenched so hard her jaw hurt. She exhaled slowly, willing herself to relax.

"I don't know," she said, shaking her head. "This has been going on for so long. I've wished that he would just get it over with and die so we could all go on with our lives. Now that it's over... I don't know. It's no relief, not really, but I expected to feel something." She laughed. "What I really want to do is get John back in here and hit him again."

Katy put her arms around her and they stood there holding each other, swaying gently back and forth. After what seemed like a long time, Katy stepped back.

"This is making us all a little crazy," she said. "The Van Gogh is still showing at the Met. Why don't we take off for a couple of hours? Your mother and John can hold down the fort."

It sounded like a good idea. Laura was overwhelmed by the prospect of spending the afternoon sharing the little apartment with her mother's grief, her brother's anger, and the cloying, Hallmark sentimentality of an extended family that flocked to death like fat, white seagulls to a discarded crust of bread.

"Great," she said. "Let's get out of here."

The morning sunshine had given way to clouds and by afternoon, a misty, bone-chilling drizzle was falling. The museum was nearly empty. They walked slowly past the paintings, saying little except to comment from time to time on this color, that texture. Laura particularly liked the pencil and reed pen sketches. They were so simple, just lines and curves, yet there was something about them that was absolutely transcendent. Her own work seemed leaden by comparison. She stopped in front of a seascape, admiring the technique—the broad pen-strokes for the rippled sea becoming tighter and finer as the sea approached the sky, the great, puffy cumulus



clouds hovering above the horizon perfectly defined by a few well-placed arcs.

A memory came to her as she stood there. She was with her father. They were fishing off the coast of Block Island, the waves rocking the little boat in a gentle rhythm. She was very small, and a little frightened by the vast expanse of blue and the smallness of the houses still visible on the distant shore. It was good to be with him, though. Her mother and brother had stayed ashore. "Just the two of us," her father had said, and she felt very proud. She had snagged her thumb on a fishhook, and it still stung with the salt of the ocean and her own sweat, but it was good to be there in the moment, it was perfect. The sun was huge and her father's face was huge and the ocean was a flat, endless plain of silvered glass....

The cab ride downtown was spent in a sad, genteel silence. When they were nearly home, Katy turned toward her.

"Was he a good father?" she asked.

Laura thought about it for a few moments.

"Not really," she said, finally. "I don't think he ever really saw me, who I really was. The focus was always on John, his schooling, his career. I think he just figured I'd get married and start spawning...."

She was silent for a moment. Absently, she traced lines in the grime on the cab window. In six sure strokes she had sketched the unmistakable outline of a Madonna and child. She looked at her index finger, grimaced, and wiped it on the seat in front of her.

"You know what he said to me when I got the fellowship at Parsons?"

Katy shook her head.

"That's good," he says. "So, you seeing anyone special?"

Katy laughed. "That sounds like Tommy."

"Doesn't it, though?" Laura paused. "That house. It just revolved around his monster ego. Every year, Mom seemed to get smaller and smaller. You talk to her now and it's like there's nothing left. Don't kid yourself, either. Dad loved being sick. He loved it. No dissent. No back talk. Mom scuttling around like a cockroach on a grid-dle. I don't think I ever heard her use the word 'cancer,' though. It was always, 'Your father's health....'"

Katy put her hand on Laura's shoulder and pressed gently.

"You know," she said, "maybe he didn't know how to love you. Maybe he didn't know how to love anybody. But I think he did the best he could, even if it wasn't much."

"I'd like to believe that," Laura said.

SOMEONE JOSTLED HER AND MUMBLED SOMETHING. She looked up. She was at the corner of Forty-Second and Lexington, one foot on the curb, one in the street, and she realized that the light had changed four times as she stood there. She threw away the remains of her lunch and returned to work.

She put off going home for as long as she could. She knew that she was stalling, but it was easy to justify—the work was going well and there was a lot of it. She sent out for deli around seven, working straight through, and finally, close to nine, decided it was time. All the other designers had left, and there was no one in the outer office. In the darkened lobby, a lone, uniformed security guard sat reading the *New York Post*, surrounded by a console of closed-circuit television monitors.

"Good night, Charlie. Keep the crack dealers out of here."

"Night, ma'am."

Her father lay where she had left him. He appeared to be asleep. His sunken chest rose and fell almost imperceptibly, and there was a dry, rattling sound coming from deep within his throat. She stood at the head of the couch, looking down at him, and felt a wave of despair wash over her.

His eyes opened.

"Hi, Dad," she said weakly.

The corners of his mouth moved slightly. It may have been a smile. She sat down next to him in the big easy chair and turned on the television with the remote control. *Miami Vice* was just starting; she remembered that it had been one of his favorites. They sat there

together in the flickering blue light, watching the images chase each other across the glowing screen.

When it was over, she carried him into her bedroom and laid him on the bed. He was very light. It was like carrying a sack of tinsel. She thought of movies she had seen as a child—beefy heroes carrying beautiful, helpless women to safety with casual ease—and she remembered her naive speculation that when the burden of consciousness left the body, the shell that remained must be nearly weightless. She returned to the living room and curled up on the couch. It was still warm from his body.

She awoke to muted traffic sounds and the light from a bright, metallic overcast coming in through the living room window. She performed her morning ablutions in a detached haze and, when she could put it off no longer, she looked in on her father. He lay there on her bed, his eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling.

"Do you...need food?" she asked. "Can you eat?"

He didn't respond.

She got a bowl of cereal from the kitchen and tried to coax a small spoonful into his mouth, but it just dribbled down the side of his cheek. She contented herself with moistening his cracked lips with a damp towel. She wondered if this was going to become a routine—shower, coffee, water her dead father, and off to work. She laughed out loud.

Am I going crazy? she thought. Is this what happens?

She looked down at him. A fly landed on his wrinkled, spotted forehead. She brushed it away, heaved a great sigh, and left for work.

The day rushed by her like scenery past the window of a speeding car. She felt possessed of a calm detachment though, and she watched herself as if from a great height—her steady, meticulous hand at the drafting table, the easy banter with her colleagues, the innocent, ongoing flirtation with one in particular who looked a little like David Byrne. The phrase "business as usual" ran through her thoughts, as if spoken by another.

She worked very late again. On her way to the subway, she passed a man and a woman of indeterminate age sitting on the sidewalk with their backs propped up against a building, feet wrapped in rags, faces caked with grime. The woman held a tattered paper cup and shook it with a slow, steady rhythm. The sparse jingle of coins sounded hollow and sad. She looked at Laura as she hurried past, her gaze expressionless, unseeing.

Laura began to cry. It started slowly, with a tension in her forehead and a few tears grudgingly released, but soon her body was wracked with great, heaving sobs. She staggered into a lamppost and threw her arms around it for support. Gradually the spasms subsided, and she walked the rest of the way to the station with slow, measured steps.

She had the first car of the train to herself and stood at the front window, looking out at the lights of the tunnel rushing past, letting herself be swayed back and forth by the rhythm of the train's motion. Her reflection stared back at her, an imperfection in the glass giving it a distorted ripple. She closed her eyes and the tunnel lights made a stroboscopic flicker against her eyelids that seemed to penetrate deep into the center of her forehead. She could feel her body—the tightness in her calves as her weight shifted, seeking balance, her stomach contracting in anticipation of hunger, and in that moment, the rhythmic motion of the train could have been the rocking of a small boat, the intermittent shriek of metal on metal the call of sea birds, the flickering on closed lids sunlight scattered from the crests of a random sea.

When she got home, her father was lying where she had left him. She stood there for a long time, staring down at him. This time, he did not awaken. She bent down and brushed his forehead with her lips. Gently, she eased the pillow out from under his head and placed it over his face. She pressed down on it until she was leaning with all her weight. He did not struggle. After a short while, a small shudder ran through his withered frame, and she knew it was over. She walked to the window and opened it, letting in the sound of the street, the cool night. She looked out at the city and imagined herself turning around and finding him gone, the bedclothes wrinkled and bearing the impression of his body. ♦

*Magic. Wizardry. Both are alive in Don Maitz's studio,  
imagination and his latest art book.*

# DREAMQUESTS

BY JANNY WURTS

IT'S POSSIBLE TO LOSE ALL track of time and place while examining a Don Maitz painting. I should know, since I've shared a studio with Don for the past seven years. The magic, the emotion, and the otherworldly sense of mystery the man can pack into an image continues to astonish me every time I watch him bring a new work to completion. Every painting he does contains its own story within itself, so that one can absorb details over time and continually discover new insights.

Before he had been recognized by major awards and accolades, I saw Don's work splashed amid the paintings of the field's preeminent artists in the book *Tomorrow and*

*Beyond*, which showcased works of imaginative painters. These early pictures stood out from the rest of the collection. It wasn't just Don's bold use of color, or the depth and breadth of his technique. Maitz originals have been hung in museums next to Pyle and Parrish, and his mastery of medium and his draftsmanship hold their own in such exalted company. He began with talent and dedication and pursued a rigorous art education, and he's used every bit of what he learned.

I'd say there's a resonance to his vision that makes his art unique. He can draw the eye, and then the mind, and evoke a profound sense of mood. He can take a simple painting with subdued colors, like *Silver Lining*, and lose you for hours in poignant contemplation. Or he can do a massively complex, challenging composition few artists would dare to try, like *Conjure Maitz*, and leave you dizzy with the frenzied sense of energy reflected

*Questing Hero—Surrounded by trouble and wondering who will get in the first bite.*







by a lonely wizard's longing for female companionship.

That sense of feeling, he once told me, was the most important thing to capture. The atmosphere to a piece was the vital backdrop to bring the characters and conflict into focus. I've watched him do drawing upon drawing, trying to capture this elusive emotional sense of presence. No matter how frustrated he gets, no matter how many pencil points he breaks or erasers he demolishes to shavings, he never quits until the result feels right to him.

As a study of his color images will reveal, a bit of his ongoing passion for perfection sings through and reaches us. More than anything else, this ability to influence the heart makes Don's work stand apart. Through dragons, witches, the sword-wielding heroes, or the bloodthirsty vampire—we gain a sense of "being there" and are left yearning for that indefinable next step, the answer to the question every successful illustration asks: what's going to happen next?

The astonishing range of Don's work can take the average viewer by surprise. One elderly gentleman at a museum show opening gave his paintings a close and quizzical study, then asked him, "What do you eat?" At a recent bookstore event where originals from his book *Dreamquests* were displayed, another young lady touched a careful finger

to the painted surface of a work. When she realized he was watching, she admitted, "I had to find out if it was velvet." By another report, a showcase where his works were left on view had to be cleaned twice daily because people continually smeared the glass as they crowded in to appreciate the wealth of detail.

Belying the Madison Avenue romance of his *Captain Morgan* image, Don has also painted pirates with a gusto that doesn't balk at nicked ears and missing fingers. He wades through books and museums and historical reenactments to make his pistols, ship rigging and cannon explosions accurate. Regular trips to a nearby theater warehouse yield a trove of period costumes to regale his models, whom he always arranges himself.

Yet something indefinably more than books, props, and story line contributes to his paintings. Don's rich and quirky sense of humor creeps into his drawings. If you ask, he can reveal subtleties within every picture. The tree roots snagging a wizard's enchanted rope, the monsters with teeth he paints in swirls of clouds and mists and smoke, the skull shape of the wrought-iron gate he once set behind the vampires kidnapping the beautiful woman in the graveyard—many of the background shapes and objects in the works contribute to the atmosphere. Finding his signature can be a chal-

*LEFT: Silver Lining—The thrust of this painting is about overcoming troubles, looking toward the bright side, and enjoying the miracles that can unfold while seeking your own patch of blue sky. ABOVE: Mistress of the Empire—Protecting one's own from harm amid the powers of magic and politics is the basic concept behind all these ceremonial trappings.*





lenge, too, as the letters are incorporated into the image with teasing and fiendish inventiveness. His name might be found in a ripple of water, as a thorn branch, or spattered out in patterns of lichen, but never the same way twice.

Besides titling his works in awful puns, Don handles space in a way that's his alone. His most representational style often leans toward crazy, shimmering abstract forms. Or his backgrounds will have those wild, colorful splashes of texture he gets by endless experimentation. I've seen him use doilies, sponges, salad bowls, screens, sand, paint rollers, and saran wrap in his studio. He even stole the toilet seat, once, to use as an air-brush template. That's not the only hazard to living alongside a genius caliber artist. His pigments tend to escape from their tubes and mark anything within range of his easel. His bank teller can attest that he once showed up to deposit a check with white streaked the length of his nose. (Apparently he'd had paint on his finger the last time he scratched an itch.) Another night as we dressed to go out to dinner, he emerged from the shower with his earlobe smeared cadmium yellow. The telephone acquired fingerprints of ultramarine blue. Nobody can claim Don doesn't concentrate to the exclusion of all else when he works.

In a fit of creative frustration, he has even admitted to bouncing a bagel off a cover in progress. That effortless, sustained sense of otherworldly mystery he brings to us, his viewers, is the result of hours of passionate labor, the energetic fusion born from the chaos of scribbles sometimes only he can decipher. As a fellow artist, I can watch him paint and still can't explain his technique. As an author who has seen him render the characters from a trilogy of collaborative novels, I can say firsthand that he captured who those story people were and made them spring to life exactly as I imagined them.

Don's willingness to lose himself in his subject matter and let the author's ideas drive his talent to make a cover image has made him special in the field of fantasy art and a much sought after illustrator.

For Don, the future holds exciting new directions. His diversity and successes are providing expanded opportunities. His newly released set of trading cards, and a recent cover done for a Batman graphic novel have refreshed his early enthusiasm for the energetic, gutsy sort of rendering found in the comics industry. In addition, the limited edition print market has expanded his audience and opened the door to refine the artist's own self-expression. Since Mill Pond Press first reproduced two of his cover works from the Ray Feist novels, he has set aside time to create more noncommissioned works for himself.

On the drawing boards now are works of imagination and spreads of pictures which unfold stories that spring from the artist's personal inspiration. His love of wizards,



pirates, and adventure and of the complex and the intricate is finding new venues of expression.

Within the next year, he will embark on a unique collaboration, as we work together to produce three original lithographs for the Fantasy 500 Consortium. Our years of sharing studio space have widened both of our horizons, and sharpened my respect for our differences. Don's meticulous, demanding perfectionism, and his impressive visual sensitivity to the tiniest impact of tone and line have a magic and a rhythm all their own. Our strengths as artists spring from very different sources. With far less training to draw on, I work in a whirlwind of intuition. Don tends to combine complex, concrete ideas, and then refine these through his sharp skills as a draftsman. He saves the wild experimentation more for textures and backgrounds. The fresh opportunity to pool our knowledge and explore a combined vision together will branch out into something new, and add another dimension to an already rich creative career. ♦

*LEFT: Knight at Sunset—The castles of northern Wales gave depth to an inspiration which began while I was in art college, to depict the romantic side of the Age of Chivalry. ABOVE: Dreamquests—This image stirs a call to arms, an insistent demand to urge the imagination to take flight.*



*There's no power on earth that can keep a mother  
from her child. But can a mother fight forces  
from under the sea?*

# HOLD ME FAST AND FEAR NOT

They live in an old frame house, nothing fancy: peeling white paint and weathered gray wood, narrow high-ceilinged rooms, a fading wallpaper of roses and ribbons on a dirty tan background, old-fashioned gas space heaters that are going to be a problem one of these days, when the baby starts crawling. There's no air conditioning, of course, but that doesn't matter so close to the ocean; she sleeps with the windows open, the cool sea air whisking through rooms that get hot and stuffy during the day. The sound of the sea pounding on rocks not so very far away is an unceasing echo through her dreams.

In those dreams the air within the room turns green, almost solid, as if she and the baby were suddenly under water. Something with webbed feet steps delicately across the room, bends over the crib—

She wakes to confusion, heart pounding, breasts aching—the baby is crying, and even before she woke, her body responded to that wail. She takes Jody out of the crib, nurses him until he falls asleep in the crook of her arm, drifts back to sleep herself in that drowsy silence. In the morning they wake together, a tangled, contented pair wrapped in wet diapers and milk-stained nightgown, and she nurses him

again before stripping the bed and beginning the day with the inevitable load of laundry to run through the washer and dryer.

Thus, two nights in a row. On the third night, when she jerks awake to the remembered sound of the baby's crying, already reminding herself that it's only a bad dream—on the third night the crib is empty.

"YOU SHOULD HAVE CALLED THE POLICE at once," her friend M.V. says later that morning, sitting over cold toast and tepid coffee in Eileen's kitchen. The radio is tuned to the Saturday morning folk and country program, but neither of them hears the music. "You should call them now."

"What's the use?" Eileen's eyes are red-rimmed from crying; she doesn't meet M.V.'s concerned glance. She supposes it was foolish, the way she kept looking around the house, as if a baby too young to crawl could have hidden himself somewhere. At first she'd thought, oh, I must have been up with him once already and fallen asleep with him in the bed—and turned back confidently to the tangled bedclothes, looking for the small red, furious face. Then she looked in the crib again. Then, and God knows why, she'd gone through the closets.

BY MARGARET BALL  
*Illustration by David Beck*

What with one thing and another, it had been nearly morning before she called M.V. for help. Now she wishes she hadn't done it. She doesn't know M.V. well, doesn't know anybody in this town that well; she came here with Jack, never wanted to know anybody else until he disappeared and left her three-months pregnant. M.V., even more pregnant at the time, and lonely—and curious too, Eileen suspects, about the young couple who'd bought the old Martinez place for cash—bullied Eileen into attending Lamaze classes with her, made her drink revolting milkshakes full of yeast and vitamins, and signed them both up for the babysitters' cooperative and playground run through the Women's Center.

She doesn't know M.V. all that well, but who else was there to call? Not the police. Eileen knows that would just be a waste of time.

Now, as M.V. starts in on that again, Eileen dumps sugar into her coffee and stirs automatically; dips the wet spoon back into the sugar bowl and brings another load of grainy sweetness to her cup. "They won't be able to do anything."

"You're sure it's Jack, then?" But M.V. is nodding even before Eileen can answer her question. "Of course. Who else. After all—" her vehement gesture encompasses the kitchen with its peeling linoleum, the cracked tile counter, the wood table scrubbed down to its bare boards—"it's not as if you had any money to attract kidnapers or something. All the same, you ought to—I mean, it could be some nut—"

"It was Jack," Eileen's voice, toneless, too certain for argument, convinces M.V.

"Well. He was your husband. I guess you know best. What did he do, leave you a note or something?"

"Something like that." A strand of seaweed on the windowsill. Dreams of green air, three nights running. And the gleam of gold: coins falling out of the crib sheets, when in her desperate search Eileen shook out the baby's little blanket as if he could be hiding somewhere in two ounces of hand-knitted blue-and-white striped wool. She brings out the handful of gold coins now, light and thin as dry leaves rustling between her fingers, and shows them to M.V.

"He paid for this house with gold, did you know that? Oh, not directly—" They both laugh uneasily at the thought of Madelyn Jenkins, the town's only real estate agent, being presented with a sack of gold instead of a certified check. "Coins, like these, and jewelry. He took it to a dealer in San Francisco. Several dealers, I guess."

"You never asked where he got it?" M.V. wants to be tactful, to respect her friend's grief, but curiosity gleams in her eyes.

Eileen shakes her head. "I guess I didn't want to know. What difference did it make? He was—I would have gone with him anyway, for as long as it lasted. And yes," she says with sudden angry vehemence, the first flash of emotion she has shown during this conversation, "I knew it wouldn't last long. Don't ask me how. I just knew it."

And yet she'd been surprised at first, that night when he woke her out of a light sleep and said, "I have to go. Don't you see? It's killing me, this—" and he waved one hand, a gesture strangely fluid and boneless, at the room around them. The crib ready for the baby to come, the curtains Eileen had made herself out of washed and hem-stitched old sheets, the battered night light in the shape of a shell. Jack loved the sea. She'd known that from the night of their meeting, on a midnight beach where he came dripping out of the water and at first she thought he was wearing one of those surfers' black wet suits. So she tried to decorate the house with ocean motifs. To keep him happy. Even the curtains were stenciled with a pattern of fish and seashells. But it wasn't enough, and as she stared sleepily up into his drawn face, it seemed to her she should have known it could never be enough. Had known, really. This midnight leave-

taking fit the pattern of their days and nights together; it had always been there, waiting for her.

"It was killing him," she says now, softly, defending the absent husband who had, it seems, come back to steal their baby. "I could see that. He looked older, and worse. Dried up somehow. So—" Her white, rounded shoulders move up and down under the maternity blouse she still wears because it's so convenient for nursing. "What do you do when a man wants to leave, you don't chain him to the wall, huh? But I never thought he'd do this to me."

M.V. isn't really listening, she's looking at her watch. "I've got to go now," she says, getting up awkwardly, bumping into the table as she tries to scoot her chair back. "Time to—I mean, I have to go," she repeats herself.

Eileen looks up at her. "You mean it's time to take Ryan to the playground. It's all right to say so. You don't have to—I mean, it's not

**D**REAMS OF GREEN AIR, THREE  
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could be hiding somewhere ....

like Jody's dead. You don't have to tiptoe and whisper around me like I'm a bereaved mother. Jack has the baby. All I have to do is find them."

"Yes. Well," M.V. says, already halfway out the door, "if there's anything I can do, just holler, OK?"

AFTER HER FRIEND'S DEPARTURE EILEEN WANDERS AROUND the kitchen aimlessly for a few minutes, picking up the coffee cups as if to wash them, depositing them on the cracked white tile beside the sink and turning away to fiddle with a damp dishcloth. Her head is fuzzy with the sea mist and the salt that makes everything so soft and damp all the time; she can't think properly. It seemed so clear a few minutes ago, but now she doesn't know what to do.

The music coming from the radio seems louder, more insistent, without M.V.'s presence to override it. And the songs have changed, too. That DJ who likes folk songs has taken over from the country-western guy. Eileen raises her hand to switch the radio off, but can't summon up enough energy to push the knob. Her hand falls back to her side and she stands passive, not exactly listening, not doing anything else.

*Little ken i my bairn's father*

*Far less the land that he dwells in.*

Then she hears it again over the music, so faint it could be a seagull's cry or just her imagining. She throws a sweater over her shoulders and hurries out into the backyard. Steps go down to the water, one hundred and fifteen wooden steps cracked and bleached from the assault of the sea.

*I am a man upon the land  
I am a selkie on the sea.*

She hurries right down the first flight of steps, past the bend where the black rock of the cliff face swells out. Here she slows and grips the handrail for the last twenty steps. These bottom planks are slippery with sea spray and half-rotten from being in the water at high tide.

Somehow the radio is getting louder, as if somebody in the kitchen were turning it up so she can't get away from the music. Even here in the bay with the water crashing up against the rocks, she can hear the faint, tinny echo of the singer's voice.

*And when I'm far and far free land*

*My home it is in Sile Skerry.*

When she gets to where the sea covers the last steps, standing ankle-deep in the water that hisses and coils like snakes around the rocks, she stops to wonder what she's doing here. The cliffs dip in here to make a shelving crescent of rocky beach at low tide, thin as the new moon or the paring of a fingernail. Nothing else, no caves, no roads up the coast. Nowhere to go from here.

She chews on one ragged thumbnail and stares out across the water, unable to tear herself away. The faint crying tugs at her like a line running through her breasts and down inside her. It could be a gull calling, just out of sight around the black cliffs. She puts one foot out toward the bay, and a retreating wave sucks the sand out from under the sole of her bare foot. The next wave tugs at her knees, almost has her down against the sharp rocks. "Eileen Georgina Donnelly, what are you doing out here?" she mutters to herself. A person could drown out here in two feet of water, pulled and smashed against the rocks until they didn't care any more, and wouldn't that make it easy for Jack.

She backs up until the bottom step bangs against the backs of her calves, puts one hand behind her and gets a firm hold of the railing. "I won't," she tells the waves, as if they could hear. "I'm not going that easy, you hear me now? You try and take me, you'll have a fight on your hands. You got that already, taking my baby away." Lord, M.V. would know she was crazy for sure if she could hear Eileen now, talking to the water like it was an enemy reaching out to kill her. Which it was.

And Jody is still crying. Calling to her. If she leaves him out there to the wind and the water and his worthless baby-snatching daddy, she'll be hearing that cry to her dying day.

There's just one thing she can do, and all of a sudden it makes perfect sense to her, though it would add to M.V.'s list of crazy things if it ever got to be known.

*And he has taken a purse of gold*

*And he has put it on her knee*

*Saying, "Give to me my little young son*

*And take thee up thy nurse's fee."*

Never taking her eyes off the rising water, she backs up the slippery wooden stairs, one step at a time, inching along with her heels banging into the risers and her arm aching from that backward-twisted hold on the railing.

The gold is still there on the kitchen table where she'd left it during all that purposeless fiddling with dirty cups and wet dishes. Shining at her like a dozen winking eyes. She stuffs it in the back pocket of her jeans without really looking at the evil stuff; then has to take it out and count it to make sure she got it all. Ha! One paper-thin coin had rolled under the kitchen table. Trying to escape her. She retrieves the coin and rubs her thumb over the faint relief of the surface: letters in a language she cannot read, the profile of a king of a distant country.

Back down the steps, then, and twice as careful this time; the water's higher and she can feel it reaching out to get her, roll her around under the foam until those black rocks bash all the fight out of her. Standing on the fifth step from the bottom to keep out of the waves' reach, she takes the coins out of her pocket and throws them out into the water. Awkward, a girl's overhand throw, but they fall into the foam.

"I don't want your money!" she calls into wind and waves and rising storm. "You hear me, Jack? Gave me back my baby!"

Wind quiets on her last words, leaving her screeching into the sudden silence like a woman gone crazy after her new-born baby is stolen out of the crib. Waves slick away from the steps. No farther; just revealing those last four slimy stairs, and the water standing like slick green walls on either side of the staircase.

As she goes down those slippery steps, sand smooths itself out before her where there should have been water and rocks. She walks forward onto the gleaming wet surface, one step, two, three, until the safety of the stairs is far behind her. She hears the dull roar of the waves knocking against the cliffs behind her now. Ahead, the pearl-white trail of sand glimmers away into a violet-tinged light of evening lands she has never known. And the baby's crying has become the thin, tired wail of a child who has given up anger and is forgetting hope.

She keeps walking, and the green air of her dreams closes round her and over her head, and things with webbed feet and hands flutter just at the sides of her vision, where she can't quite get a good look at them without taking her eyes off the path before her. So she goes forward through a green tunnel. The air grows thick and cold around her as she walks, the glimmering white sands drop away under her feet and she feels the insistent rhythmic push and pull of the ocean currents. Far, far below, glinting with lights of pearl and abalone, gay with spires of coral and screens of seaweed, she sees the place where she must go.

How long does she walk to reach those coral towers? It might be an hour; it might be seven years.

As she draws near, the water that presses down and around her is full of sound: high, sweet singing of inhuman voices that climb the scale and wind tendrils of melody around her, the lower murmur of the watchers gathered together at the base of the highest tower, waiting there for her. None of the sounds come through her ears; they are just *there*, inside her head, intruders she can't block out.

She can no longer hear the baby.

She stops where the path winds into a semicircle of sand that sparkles with the light of jewels, or stars: shifting lights of blue-green, rainbow, white crystal. Around the edges of the circle are grouped tall, slender, dark people with narrow heads and wide, tilted eyes. Like Jack. Like a hundred Jacks, all staring at her with parted silent lips, waiting for her to see and understand something she should have known before she came here. Just as she should have known that Jack wasn't hers to keep, that he was going to leave some day.

"I didn't come here for Jack," she tells them. "I don't want—" But that's a lie. In the midst of her hurting for the baby there's another hurt now, an aching desire that grows every time one of these seafolk turns his head or looks at her with eyes like Jack's. Oh, yes, she'd have him back in a minute if he came to her now, all wet and penitent and promising it would never happen again.

One of the seafolk detaches himself from the watching group and glides forward with an expression and movements so like Jack's, that makes the breath catch in her throat for a moment. Then she sees that it is Jack, changed now past all returning—or has he simply gone back to what he was all along? Those slender, boneless feet with the delicate fine webbing between the toes could never walk on land. The long narrow head and the too-large, too sharply tilted eyes could never pass for human.

All the same, she can't look at him without remembering the sharp sweetness of nights in the little house at the top of the cliffs.

"I'm not going back." She hears his voice inside her head and knows he's not really talking, his lips don't even move, but that is too much strangeness for her, down under the green water, and everything is bad enough already. So she will pretend they are talking like normal human people, and since it's her story, that's how it will be told. "I can't live there," he says, then, "it was killing me."

"I know," Eileen says sadly. "I remember. You were all the time hurting for this, weren't you? There was nothing I could do to make it up to you." She stops, swallows a lump in her throat, plunges on without grace. "You're—looking good, Jack. I didn't come to try and talk you into coming back. But you can't have my baby."

His smile is thin, cruel, infinitely alien, and those nights in the

creaking old house are a million years away. "My son, human woman. Why did you think I took you, when I could have had a woman of my own kind?"

Murmur of quickly suppressed laughter in her head; bright, curious tip-tiled eyes of the bejeweled, graceful seafolk watching her, all around her now. Undersea currents push Eileen this way and that. She flounders against the currents, looking for something solid to hold on to, while the seafolk bend with the waves as easily as seaweed swaying under water.

"Go back, Eileen," Jack says, more gently now. "It's no good. The bargain's made, and I'll have my son with me to raise as one of our own."

She digs her heels into the bright sparkling sand, and it's just as sharp as it looked to be, all those millions of tiny crystals cutting into her feet. "No," she says. "No. I don't make a bargain."

As if those were the magic words, the crowd of seafolk parts to let them through. She follows Jack until they reach a bank of sand where two sea women are seated. The baby is sleeping in their laps, one arm flung out and starfish fingers splayed out wide open. His mouth is slightly open too, but he is not using it to breathe or even to blow bubbles. The bubbles are coming out of a slit in the side of his neck, a narrow opening half-covered by folds of fat baby flesh.

"You bore my son and bathed him and tended him for two months," Jack says mockingly, "and never even noticed that he'd been born for the sea."

"I thought it was—a birth defect," Eileen tells him. "The doctor said the slits might close up when he got bigger, or we could have plastic surgery—"

"He is born for the sea," Jack repeats. "He belongs here. You don't. We let you come down here to see him, but we don't have to let you stay. Do you want to try it?"

The green air around Eileen seems to collapse inward, leaving her in darkness, with the wet, cold touch of the water pushing at her everywhere, squeezing her down into a tiny ball of pain. Her lungs ache for air and she tries to breathe, even knowing that she'll choke on salt water, but needing so badly to fill her lungs that it doesn't matter: drowning would be an easier death than this, being squeezed to nothing with the roaring of her own blood in her ears.

Abruptly the pressure stops. After a moment she can see again; after a few ragged gasps of blessed air, the noise in her ears dies down and she can hear herself breathing.

They could have killed her. Why didn't they? They've made it clear enough they don't want her here and have no intention of giving Jody back—but she's *here*, isn't she? Maybe there are some rules, after all. They come on all high and mighty, like they're too rich and fine to be bound by ordinary laws: well, Eileen's met mortal human people like that before, and sometimes they get caught by the law even if they are rich. Must be some law here, different maybe, but something that made them give her a hearing after she threw the money back in their faces.

Eileen slowly straightens herself and stares down the seafolk, who are smiling behind webbed hands at her panic and pain.

"You go on and stay here if you've a mind to, Jack, even though you'll be breaking your marriage vows," she says. "I don't care. All I want is Jody."

One of the sea ladies who has been petting and stroking the baby stands now, slowly, so as not to wake him. Eileen sees that she is even more richly dressed than the others, and there's a circle of living lights around her forehead, hiding back the long flowing hair that looks so much like wet seaweed.

"If promises were made, promises must be kept," she says slowly, and she directs a look at Jack that Eileen has seen a thousand times in her life, it's the way Mama used to look at her brothers when they would come home too drunk to walk straight.

The sea lady's movement has left the baby with only one lap to sprawl on. It's not enough; he thrashes in his sleep, half wakes and begins an automatic wail of protest. Eileen pushes through the heavy water and reaches him, snatches him up and buries his cries in her shoulder. He quiets at once and begins mumbling at her sleeve,

sucking and kneading the cloth with his lips.

"I'm all right," she tells the lady. "If Jack doesn't want to stay with me, I'm not one to try and force him."

Jody starts grizzling against her shoulder; a wet sleeve doesn't fool him for long. Eileen hitches up her big loose shirt and slides his head under. Greedy little lips close on her nipple, sucking so hard even when he doesn't need to, even when her breasts are so full the milk must be spurring into his mouth. It always hurts for those first few minutes, feels as if he's sucking on a string that goes right through her down to her toes. But now the painful tug feels right to Eileen, reminds her that they're *connected*, she and the baby.

"It's all right," she tells the sea lady again. "I don't need anything from Jack. So I'll just take the baby now and go—home—"

"The child is as much ours as yours," the sea lady says then.

The baby has let go of her breast and is clinging to Eileen. Eileen shifts his weight to her other arm and tries to stare down this woman. It doesn't work. But she won't back down, either. "No, ma'am, I reckon not."

"We have tried to deal fairly with you and your kind." The lady is almost pleading. "You must understand. There are fewer of us every year. We can only make more of our kind with your help; and most of your airbound women are not as brave as you."

Eileen shakes her head. It wasn't courage that drew her to Jack. She had loved him, that was the pure and simple truth of it, and when you love somebody you don't care if their hands and feet are shaped funny or if they're a little strange in their ways sometimes.

Staring into the sea queen's pleading eyes, Eileen feels uncomfortable, and Jody is heavy in her arms. But she is not about to put him down. Not here. Maybe not at home, either, supposing they ever get back there. No, she just might tote this child like a sack of groceries until he's as tall as she is and then some.

"He belongs with us, he bears the birth-signs." That is Jack again, so proud of those slits on Jody's neck.

"He breathes just fine on land too," Eileen retorts. "Can't prove a thing by that."

"We would love him and care for him," the sea queen pleads.

Eileen shakes her head again. "Don't doubt you would, ma'am, as best you know how. But he's only got one mother, and that's me. I have to be sure he's raised right, don't you see? That's my job. Can't hand it over to anybody else. Can't send him away with strangers. It's not right."

"You think nobody can love him like you."

"Know it." Eileen is tired of words. The connection between her and Jody isn't something you can explain in words. You had to feel a baby tugging at your breast, had to stumble out of bed half-dead for sleep and be seduced by his smile, had to fall in love all over again every morning with his fat, creased thighs and wildly kicking feet.

"Would you be willing to put it to a trial?"

Eileen looks suspiciously round the circle of cold, tense faces. There is some trick here. But what can she do? They aren't going to drown her, seemingly, but neither do they seem willing to just let her and Jody go. And she doesn't fancy spending the rest of her life out of sight of the sun.

Only, how can she outwit all these fine, clever seafolk? She hadn't even been smart enough to recognize Jack's marriage vows for lies, hadn't even had the sense to lock the doors and windows against somebody coming in to take her baby.

"Don't be afraid," the sea queen says, "it won't hurt." Her voice reminds Eileen of the doctor at the clinic. Trying to sound nice and only achieving condescending; you could tell he thought she was nothing but an ignorant Southern poor white trash girl who had to have everything explained to her three times over.

"And after the test, you'll let us go?"

"If you still want him afterward," the sea queen says with a secret smile, "you and the child may return to the airbound world. But if you grant him to us—"

"I'll never do that!"

"No?"



She sounds too happy and altogether too sure of herself. Eileen starts to cry. "Wait!" but it is too late; the green seaworld dissolves around her like the shreds of a dream, and with Jody in her arms she falls through a tunnel of darkness into another dream. With her goes the insistent music from up above the waters.

*And they shall turn me in your arms  
Into a lion wild  
But hold me fast and fear not  
As you shall love your child*

She wants to tell somebody that it's the wrong song, but she can't remember why.

THE BABY IS CRYING AGAIN. HOW MANY TIMES HAS SHE BEEN UP with him this night? Four, five? Nothing seems to settle him. And last night, and the night before that...Feels like forever and a day since she's had any sleep. Her head is full of fog. Nothing appeases him for long; he sucks on her breast for a moment and then twists his head away and starts crying again, thin, sharp aching wails that used to make her heart break for him. Now she only hates the noise and what it means: that she'll have to drag herself out of bed, pluck the baby out of his crib and walk up and down, up and down, until he quiets on her shoulder. The doctor says there's nothing wrong with him, a lot of babies are colicky at this age, he'll grow out of it. Eileen wonders, even while she jiggles him expertly on her shoulder, whether she'll live to see him grow out of it. Standing up is torture, the third, fourth, fifth night without more than a few minutes of sleep snatched between crying fits. Praise God, he's calming down now; one wrinkled red fist jammed in his mouth, eyes fluttering shut. Eileen lowers him with infinite care into the crib. Just take it slow and easy now, maybe he'll sleep, sometimes he dozes off for a whole hour at a time and she can get some—

The instant the baby's head touches the mattress, he startles: arms and legs played out like a starfish, eyes briefly open and then screwed shut as he concentrates on a wail to rip the roof off. Eileen's hands pause on the crib rail, clench into fists. "Stop that, you little monster!" she screams.

The baby's wall stops on a shocked indrawn breath. He begins to sob and hiccup at the same time. Eileen looks at her clenched hands, wills the fingers to release their grip on the rail. One finger at a time. You don't really want to tear the crib apart and beat the baby's head in with the pieces. Not really... Maybe if she walks him just a little more he'll tire himself out.

She hefts the baby's bulk against her shoulder and begins walking again, around and around the border of the braided rag rug, eyes on the speckled stripes of white and blue, carefully not thinking. After a few times round the rug, she begins to sing a lullaby in a voice cracking with exhaustion. She is so tired that she can't see straight, the blue rug under her feet seems to be rippling like water and she hears the rushing of waves in her ears.

She's in the kitchen, cooking up a mess of fish and mussels one of the neighbors gave them, concentrating on stirring the pot so nothing burns. As long as she keeps stirring, keeps watching the pot, she doesn't have to look at Jody.

He is standing on the other side of the scrubbed board table. Twelve years old and the image of Jack, only Jack never stood like that, taut with anger, spitting out accusations. He just went away and came back late at night, wet from swimming, to make peace with her in their silent bed...

"You never let me do anything!" It's an old complaint. "No wonder my dad left. You probably kept him tied down like this too. What

did you do—give him a curfew and make him report in every night?"

For an instant it's Jack, not Jody, standing by her bed after one of those midnight swims. *This is killing me. I have to get away.*

Children don't know how much their words can hurt. Eileen keeps stirring the pot and tries not to listen to Jody's angry words, all the accusations he is hurling at her. She can't even remember what started this round, and by now she would bet that he can't either. All the old complaints come spilling out. They're poor, she won't let him have the clothes he needs to keep up with his school friends, he never gets neat presents and trips for his birthday...

"Is that all you can think about?" she interrupts him finally. "Things?" How did she raise a boy who cared for nothing but the things she could—or couldn't—buy him? What did she do wrong?

"I wish I could live with my dad!" he yells and slams out of the

**H** *e is standing on the other side  
of the scrubbed board table.  
The image of Jack, only Jack  
never stood like that, taut with anger, spitting out  
accusations. He just went away and came back to  
make peace with her in their silent bed...*

house to retell his grievances to some friend who'll be more sympathetic.

Eileen catches her breath and goes to the screen door. He's already out of sight, and it's just as well. She was on the verge of yelling, "So go and live with your father then, if that's what you want, and give me some peace and quiet for a change!"

But she doesn't say it. Not quite. She goes back to the stove and bends her head over the pot. In the moment she was away it seems to have come to the boil; the fish are moving in the bubbling water as if they were alive, and the water is rising higher and higher to carry her away...

SHE HATES HOSPITALS—THE ANTISEPTIC SMELL, THE BLUE FLICKER of fluorescent lighting, the hushed voices. Why are they here?

"Mrs. Donnelly." The young doctor touches her shoulder. "Mrs. Donnelly, you remember why you're here?" He is tall and slender, with black hair seal-sleek on his narrow head, with large dark eyes that watch her in concern.

"Yes. You called—somebody called from the hospital. They said Jody had an accident on his motorbike, and I'm not surprised, tearing around the way he does! Have you got him stitched up yet? When can we go home?"

"Mrs. Donnelly—Eileen—that was a month ago. Don't you remember?"

He puts a hand on her head, gently turns her to face the bed in the center of the room and the motionless form under the sheet. Face covered in bandages, tubes going into the arms. That's not Jody—

*Continued on page 75*

## Death Gate brings the graphic adventure to a new level.

**Y**OU ARE IN A ROOM. THERE IS A TABLE HERE. THERE IS A DOOR TO THE SOUTH. That's it. That's what all adventure games on computers used to look like. Way back in Colossal Cave, fantasy gamers learned to crawl, walk, run, fight and die all at the mercy of a text parser and simple descriptions of their environment. And the all-text adventure is not without a certain appeal. Even today the Internet is crawling with MUD's (Multi-User Dungeons) where people interact only through text.

Almost from the beginning, some programmers felt compelled to supplement their games with graphics. Considering the limitations of some of this hardware (ever see a dragon drawn on a TRS-80?), a number of these early efforts turned out surprisingly well. Still, InfoCom—once the uncrowned king of adventure games—used to run ads which said something along the lines of 'We have the best graphics—your imagination.' And when the best that the machines could manage was low resolution images from a limited set of colors, they had a distinct point.

But times, and graphics hardware, have changed. Series like Sierra On-Line's *King's Quest*, which started from very humble beginnings, now have all the flash of a professional cartoon. With the current crop of PC and Mac machines capable of displaying images with much higher resolutions and much broader palettes of color, computer graphics have stopped looking like stick figures and begun to look more like illustrations.

Legend's new graphic adventure *Death Gate* is a case in point. This program clearly has its roots in earlier programs, but with the advantages of Super VGA (video graphics array) and the storage capabilities of CD-ROM,

it just as clearly raises the bar in computer adventure.

The Macintosh has been a bit ahead of the game in graphics for a couple of years, with a nice standard for color graphics. On the PC, most games are still written to the VGA standard. This means a low resolution image in 256 colors, or a higher resolution in only 16 colors. The majority of games are written to the lower resolution, as the wealth of colors is generally more helpful than a sheer increase in the number of dots.

Unfortunately, progress on PC graphics was stalled at the VGA level by a failure of manufacturers to get together on one standard. IBM, who had been playing the lead up through VGA days, fell back and became one of the band, its XGA (expanded graphics array) just another card in a crowd. No one else managed to snatch up the baton and run with it.

But gradually enough manufacturers began offering patches and drivers to support higher resolutions that a sort of unofficial "Super VGA" standard was born. Games have been slow coming out for this semi-standard for a couple of reasons: no one likes giving up that part of their audience whose graphics didn't match the new specs, and the higher resolution images can take up huge amounts of space.

Finally, with almost every machine these days being shipped with Super VGA graphics, and with CD-ROM to take the burden of megabytes of image data, graphics adventures are moving into the high resolution age. Even InfoCom, the scourge of graphics, is taking advantage of these advances to show us the places that their previous games only described.

*Death Gate* makes extensive use of Super VGA, and in doing so, it slices, dices, and does away with every other graphic adventure on the shelves. The images here are wonderful—equal to most of those which appear as book covers and magazine illustrations. Wood looks like wood. People look like people. Blood-thirsty monsters look... thirsty. Many of these images are essentially static—backdrops for the text and speech which carries on the game. But they serve their purpose well. And when you do interact with the graphics, the animation is generally smooth and nicely done. Too many role-playing games and adventures rely on the user to touch every pixel on the screen in hopes of finding the objects that can actually be used (*King's Quest* is the biggest offender). *Death Gate*

Legend's adventure game *Death Gate* has drop-dead gorgeous graphics. The dead serve the living in rocky tunnels filled with molten lava.



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by Don Maitz



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*"I wanted the viewers involved to the point where they would sink down into the image. The perspective and foreshortening heightens the sense of vertigo, naturally augmenting the movement implied by the twisting figures set over radiating and concentric elements."*

— Don Maitz

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Death Gate's multimedia technology contains 3-D modeled figures and incredible animated sequences.

doesn't make you hunt and click. The interface is nothing too revolutionary, but like the graphics, it's refined above the usual level. It serves its purpose, and by and large stays out of the way.

Now, having spent several paragraphs in praise of graphics, let's get down to the real stuff. After all, I make my living as a writer, not a painter. Is the game intriguing? Is it interesting? Does it play well? Is the story good enough to hold your attention when your eyes are no longer dazzled?

For the most part, the answer to all these questions is yes. The story comes directly from the Weiss and Hickman novels, and anyone who has been a fan of those books will feel at home here. The actual gameplay is nothing really earthshaking. If you've been through a couple of graphic role-playing adventures, you should sit down and make your way in without needing to resort to heavy browsing through the documentation. And without the reflex-heavy "twitch play" of the latest *Ultima*, you won't feel you need to warm up the Nintendo to get your reflexes in shape before starting.

This familiar interface and play is something of a drawback. If you've done a lot of this type of gaming, *Death Gate* may seem like just another in a long series. It's not as innovative as a game as *Myst* or *Dragon Lore*. It's a graphic adventure. And except for the fact that it's drop-dead gorgeous, it is only a little better than what came before. In fact, you could say that this game is the ultimate evolution of the traditional graphic role-playing adventure. Ultimate till next week, of course. Then we'll expect something better.

But *Death Gate* is on the shelves this week. And if you've got a Super VGA system, nothing else is quite so good for showing it off. Unless you've got an awfully colorful imagination, this game has got you beat.

**Magic Carpet.** (Electronic Arts, 1-800-245-4524) is a flight simulator without the plane, and it breaks all the rules to make something new in the fantasy gaming industry.

Gaming series have always been popular, but these days the shelves at the computer store are starting to be as crowded with

sequels as the screens at the local movie theater. *Wing Commander III*, *King's Quest 7*. It's not that these games aren't good (both of the mentioned games are very good), but they do lack a degree of originality.

When something totally different appears on the shelves, it can get lost in the array of familiar titles. For the sake of fantasy gaming's future, let's hope *Magic Carpet* stays on the front of the racks.

*Magic Carpet* flies in from a whole different world. It draws elements from both flight simulators and strategy games, then mixes them with a refreshing Arabian flavor. This game is innovation, innovation, and nothing but innovation. And if it finds a home in the heart of fantasy gamers, it could spawn a whole new genre of fantasy computer games.

The game is published by entertainment software giant Electronic Arts, but the developer was the UK's Bullfrog Productions. Bullfrog has long been known as a company to watch. Their game *Populous* introduced the whole idea of the "god game," where the player got to work his will on a whole world filled with helpless little people. Most recently, they've scored again with their action/strategy crossover *Theme Park*, where players try their hand at creating their own mega-amusement park.

*Magic Carpet* represents as much a departure for Bullfrog as it does for fantasy games in general. While *Magic Carpet* does have strategic elements, its heart is built around a complex, high speed flight simulator. But it's no F-15 that you're swooping around the countryside on—it's a rug. As the title implies, this game centers on flying a magic carpet over the countryside, blasting magical enemies and competing rug jockeys.

The goal of the game is to become master of fifty "worlds." You do so by gathering and controlling the available magical "manna" in each world. (What else would you gather? Manna has suddenly become the buzzword for magical energy.) Manna can be found hoarded in special sites, or can be gathered by destroying various beasts. You'll need a castle to keep the manna in, which you can build by using the first magic spell you pick up. As your glowing spell strikes the earth,

the ground buckles and rises, morphing in real time to form a lovely fortress. When there's free space in your castle, a hot air balloon is launched, which slowly drifts over to gather the manna and carry it home. Watching the hot air balloon maneuver around the land, and watching the balls of manna levitate into the balloon is one of the spiffiest game bits ever programmed.

The mixture here is two parts flight simulator, one part puzzle game. Each level contains traps, prizes, and pitfalls that have to be mastered before moving on. Spells are stored in little red jars, and you'll need to find pretty well every one by the time you're at the midpoint of the list of worlds. That means each world must be explored thoroughly, with an eye out for the special formation of standing stones that can represent a magical site—and another eye peeled for traps that can release hordes of nasties.

The landscape in the game is generated from a fractal algorithm, and the result is little short of spectacular. Rolling hills, jagged peaks, valleys, islands, cliffs—everything looks very realistic. And the realism doesn't stop with the terrain. Buildings, from the smallest tent to the largest fortress, are nicely detailed and interact with the player and creatures realistically. Trees and other features are also nicely done.

Sound is as well textured as the graphics. Move out over the sea, and you'll hear the sound of breakers on the shore. Cruise close to an occupied building, and you'll hear the babble of voices within. Get too close to one of the crawling monsters called "worms," and you'll get an earful of its piercing shriek.

What's really astounding, though typical of the kind of detail you see in a Bullfrog product, is the way everything interacts. Throw a fireball at a monster who is standing close to a tree, and the tree can catch on fire. In turn, the burning tree may do more damage to the beast than your attack. Just be careful not to cruise into a burning forest yourself; it can take you out just as fast. And if that fireball misses and hits the earth, it leaves a scorched path. More powerful spells can form canyons or create mountains—all right in front of your eyes. When a creature is killed, its manna emerges in the form of glowing golden balls. These balls roll down hills, gathering in low spots, or ending up floating on the sea. The way they bounce and behave makes chasing them a little game in itself.

The people who live on the island deserve special notice. Work with them carefully, use them as a source of manna, and they can be a great boost to your strength. But be careful when getting into a fight with monsters or other carpet riders. A few fireballs accidentally smashed into a town can turn the people against you. Soon enough they'll build an army and send archers out to lay waste to your castle. It's much better to have these guys on your side than to spend your time warding off one attack after another.

The innovation in *Magic Carpet* doesn't

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stop with the mechanics of play. Bullfrog has packed in three ways to enjoy the game in real 3-D. First off, there's a pair of glasses that'll make everyone who ever saw *Creature From the Black Lagoon* open at the Bijou feel right at home. The effect is good, but it can make color recognition difficult. Next comes an option to throw the whole game into moving stereogram mode. If, like millions of other people, you've become fascinated with these eye-crossing creations, just seeing a stereogram actually moving in real time is quite a treat. But as far as really playing in this mode, forget it. You're lucky if you can keep your eyes focused long enough to tell a mountain from a molehill, much less get a beeline on an attacking killer bee. Finally, the program also supports the first generation of virtual reality headsets. For those who have the cash to buy one, this is surely the way to go. For those that haven't given in to the idea of a \$700 gaming accessory, a few minutes of playing *Magic Carpet* on one of these rigs will have you looking under the dryer for loose change.

And speaking of cash, I hope you invested plenty in your computer system, because *Magic Carpet* demands a lot. Electronic Arts claims the game can be played on a 486sx/25. Maybe, but only if you're the kind of person who enjoys sticking your face in a strobe lamp. To actually play and enjoy this game, I'd recommend a 486/50. Minimum. And don't forget the RAM—8 meg to get in the door, 16 if you've got it. For those lucky enough to have a Pentium and 16 meg of RAM, you can enjoy the game in high resolution mode, where everything looks spectacular enough to have been cut from an episode of *Aladdin*. But note that even a Pentium is not enough to push the high res mode around too briskly. This is a game that is poking hard against the limits of the available technology.

One more little technological treat hidden in this package is the network support. For the last year, networks all over the country have been bouncing to the heavy weaponry of *Id's Doom*. *Magic Carpet* is ready to kick those cacodemons off the nets. Multiplayer action in this game is furious and frustrating, as you alternate between trying to steal each other's manna, attacking the other guy's castle, or just going in for the kill. There's nothing quite like conjuring a volcano right underneath an opponent and watching it splash into the crater.

If there is a weak spot in the program, it's the documentation. The manual is a minuscule, poorly organized bit of fluff that fails to even explain how to win the game. To get past the first world, I had to subject myself to the ridicule of 12-year-old joystick jockeys and beg for advice on the Internet. I applaud Bullfrog and Electronic Arts for the effort that went into the game, but please remember to provide a little basic information for those who don't happen to be on the same wavelength.

*Magic Carpet* is among a handful of really

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original games that come out each year. It hits the mark in graphics, sound, and game play. If you've got the horsepower to play this game, grab it.

And if there should happen to be a *Magic Carpet 2*, I don't think I'll complain.

This well-fitting *Masque of the Red Death* (TSR, Inc., Lake Geneva, WI, (414) 248 3625, \$25.00) revamps Ravenloft.

OK, so I wrote about *Ravenloft* just a few issues back, and I had several complaints. My primary problem with *Ravenloft* was, and is, the poor fit between TSR's traditional sword-swinging dungeon crawling advanced D&D universe and the very Victorian horror elements of *Ravenloft*. This is one time when the seams definitely show.

What I didn't know was that while I was yammering on in print, TSR had already heard the pleas of those who couldn't quite picture barbarian swordsmen vs. Doctor Frankenstein and had done something about it. They've patched that ugly gap with a new campaign expansion—*Masque of the Red Death*. This set is far more than the standard pre-planned adventure in a box; this is what *Ravenloft* should have been in the first place.

*Masque* introduces the player to a world called "Gothic Earth." For all intents, this is our world in the 1890's—with the exception of all those nasty beasts lurking in the shadows. The campaigns outlined in this package take the player into adventures loosely modeled after an Edgar Allen Poe story, an Arthur Conan Doyle-style (Doyle-esque?) chase after Jack the Ripper, and a macabre investigation set along the docks in turn-of-the-century San Francisco.

The nicely fat *Guide to Gothic Earth* rule book provides a nice, overall guide to the period, covering such essentials as the spiritualist movement, and providing the necessary charts for mapping AD&D traits onto more modern characters. A trio of chapbooks provide details on the ready made adventures. And don't worry that once these three are out of the way, you have to roll up your London bobbies and get out your broadsword. There's easily enough information in this package to allow you to create more adventures in Gothic Earth.

Finally, finally, I can send a character out with a cross in one pocket and a revolver in another. The thrill of the chase. London at night. The smell of damp tweed. Bangers for breakfast. All right, I'm getting carried away. But this is the gaming experience I had been hoping to find ever since horror RPGs started landing on the shelves.

If I had my way, TSR would stick this one in the *Ravenloft* box and skip the rest, but since they've sold a scadzillion *Ravenloft* products without my advice, I suspect this will continue as an add-on. But it's one heck of a revamping for *Ravenloft* (pun intended). It takes that world from near the bottom of my Favorite Game World list to right up to the top. ♪

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# HOLD ME

Continued from page 69

it can't be Jody. Above his head, a TV screen shows a barely flickering green line.

"The EKG is nearly flat, Eileen. It's been that way since the accident. Jody isn't going to recover."

The whole room goes green for a moment, wavering like the green line on the TV screen.

"You know that for sure?" she demands.

"It's as certain as anything can be in medicine." The doctor's eyes slide away from her own. "And if he does recover, he'll be a vegetable. Unable to walk, talk, feed himself. Incontinent. It'll be like caring for a baby for the rest of your life."

Jody trapped in a body he couldn't move, Jody who was like a lightning flash in a summer storm, always fidgeting, tapping his foot. Jody, who used to have to turn round the school building three times as soon as they let him out of the kindergarten. Eileen imagines Jody's eyes looking at her out of that prison of a body, asking why she'd let this happen to him, didn't she know he'd rather be dead? The doctor is saying something else, something about useful organs, how fortunate it was his body wasn't harmed in the crash; shoving papers in front of her.

"Sign now, Mrs. Donnelly. Spare yourself needless suffering."

"You don't know," Eileen protests in a low voice.

"Do you?"

That still white form isn't her Jody. He has gone away, farther than she can follow him, lost in a distant country where no sound is spoken; that's what the doctor is trying to tell her. Eileen reaches out to take the pen, but her eyes are blurred with tears and she can't see where to sign on the form.

If Jody were really gone, wouldn't she feel it?

Who, her? The pure fool who'd thought his father meant love and a life together, who couldn't recognize a man bound to skip out before he took on any real responsibilities? The woman who'd poured love into a boy and got back only a permanently angry rebel? What did she know about anything?

"Just sign right here. Let us take care of him."

Eileen frowns through her tears. There is something wrong with this memory—there'd been something else about Jack, he wasn't just the bone-selfish drifter she was remembering now. Something about this doctor, too.

"I thought you people were supposed to save lives, not take them away."

The doctor sighs, reaches up and pulls off his mask. Two slits pulse in his neck, under a long narrow face with wide, tip-tilted eyes. "We save what we can. He should be ours now. You can't do anything for him."

She'd thought he was wearing surgical

gloves, thin clear plastic. But when she looked at the hands holding the clipboard, she could see now that it was his own skin stretched fine as silk between the outspread fingers, his own flesh smooth and dark and shining.

"You can't know," she repeated, and the hospital room wavered around her, the pale green walls growing darker and trembling as though a great wind or a powerful current were passing through them....

"SO HOW DID YOU TRACK THE BASTARD down?" M.V. demands. "And what do you mean, you made a deal? You're Jody's mother. Jack walked out on you two before Jody was even born. He doesn't have any right to be talking about deals."

Sun's shining on the little scrap of lawn behind Eileen's house. M.V.'s Ryan and Eileen's Jody and half a dozen other babies roll and tumble and suck their fists on the grass. This morning, as a welcome-home present for Eileen and Jody, M.V. showed up with the other playgroup mothers to build a fence of steel posts and chicken wire between Eileen's yard and the sea cliffs.

"He's still Jody's father," Eileen reminds her. "And—it's not right for Jody to grow up without knowing his dad at all. Dangerous." Her mind skitters away from an adolescent turning his questions into hatred, from a wild young man running his motorcycle into a concrete embankment. She pulls herself together to answer M.V.'s question. "It's—visiting rights, I guess you'd call it," she tells her friend. "Not for a while. I agreed that when he's seven, he can spend summers with Jack. And when he's fourteen, he can choose where he wants to live."

"That's awfully young, seems to me," says M.V., still faintly critical.

Together they watch the babies. This young, the kids don't really play together; each is in his own orbit. The playgroup is really just an excuse for the mothers to get together and swap child-rearing hints and horror stories. Well, Eileen thinks, some stories you never tell.

*And it shall come to pass on a summer's day  
When the sun shines bright on every stone  
That I will take my little young son  
And teach him how to swim the foam.*

Ryan, at five months, can roll over and bat at a butterfly that hovers just beyond his reach. Jody, at two months and a week, sucks his fist and watches the hovering butterfly with placid, unfocused eyes.

M.V. sighs sharply. "Awful young," she repeats. "Doesn't give you much time alone with him."

Jody's head moves from side to side. The butterfly is nice, but he's ready to see his mom again. Eileen slips from her chair to kneel beside him. "I guess none of us has as much time as we'd like," she replies over her shoulder to M.V. "I'll just have to do my best in the years I do have." She lifts Jody up in the clear bright air. "Look, baby," she gurgles, "Sun! See the pretty sun?" ■

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## TRUE AND ONLY

Continued from page 39

him back! I can make him alive again! I know the magic, you see. Mammath showed me the magic, long ago, long, long ago, in the woods, in the night, while you all snored in your beds!" Wildly her head swung, her crazed eyes raking them all. "See, look!" Her fingers clanged dramatically. "I'll turn you all into things! Slugs and snails, so the toads will eat you! Gnats and fireflies, so the bats will swoop down and snap you up! So I can and so I will!"

But they knew the truth, and even in her madness Leah saw it then. The blacksmith's wife and the wheelwright's wife and Carolan's mother and all the others, staring, unmoved, unafraid. And presiding over them all like a carrion crow, the beldame herself with her stick of blackthorn wood and with the certainty of Leah's fate in her eyes. The blacksmith's wife stood nearest to the desecrated grave. She turned, stooped, and picked up the spade Leah had dropped. Then she smiled, and slowly, steadily, the women began to close in.

Only the beldame didn't advance, for her sharp old eyes had seen a flicker of movement by the lych gate, the flutter of a priestly robe betrayed by the moon. She spared one glance for the other women, just enough to be assured that all was as it should be, then moved away from the closing circle and hobbled toward the gate.

"Ah, grandmother..." Father Borlagh's voice quavered just a little, though his brows frowned sternly down at her. "What do you do here tonight?"

The beldame smiled a smile that made the blood trickle like dust in his veins. "Nothing that is the concern of priests or men, good Father."

"This is God's holy place!"

"Indeed it is, and God's justice will be done here." A hand, a claw, reached out to pat his arm. "Go you home now, Father Borlagh. Go you home and say your prayers, and leave women's work to the hands of women. All will be finished before morning."

The priest watched her as she limped back toward the small, silent circle by the graveside. He knew he should follow, but he could not. At this moment no man, if he was wise, would dare to follow where the beldame trod.

He turned at last and walked slowly away. And as he went, he heard the sounds begin. Sounds like the muffled beating of drums in steady, inexorable rhythm, as eight staves and one long-handled spade rose and fell, rose and fell, rose and fell, in the moonlit church-yard.

LEAH OPENED HER EYES TO SEE STARLIGHT glittering among the boughs of the yew tree far above her head. For a few moments she remembered nothing, and then she remembered everything, and with a small cry—

which her ears did not hear—she tried to sit up. Something seemed to hold her back—then suddenly there was a sensation as of tearing and she found herself standing on her own feet and gazing down at what lay in the grass where she had awakened....

The beldame and her ewe-flock had done their work well, and there was no blood to stain this hallowed place. Only a broken, boneless doll, discarded now and left behind to lie beneath the yew tree.

Leah said: "Oh..." And then she began to understand, and she said: "Oh, yes. Oh, yes..."

THE WOMEN WERE GONE, back to their hearths and their menfolk, their lips sealed. Father Borlagh was gone to the shelter of his house and his close-drawn curtains and would utter no word of what he had seen. Leah giggled, though the sound was beyond the hearing of any human soul. Oh, yes, oh, yes. They had shown her the way, and now at last she knew what she must do.

The grave was whole again, the headstone upright, the flowers lovingly replaced and nodding their frail heads in the night breeze. No breeze moved Leah's hair and skirt as she stepped to the graveside and knelt down. She sang Carolan's name, three times three. And at the last singing she closed her eyes and felt the land around her slip away, far away, as she gave herself to the call of another and more terrible world.

And he was there, as she had known he would be, asleep in the dark and only waiting. She touched his face with fingers light and insubstantial as cobwebs, and he woke, and he saw her.

"Carolan." The thing that Leah had become spoke tenderly as a mother to her new-born child, and her fingers caressed his cheek, his hair, his breast. "Ah, Carolan."

He tried to make a sound, an inarticulate cry of fear, of horror. Then his lips formed Calla's name.

"No, no, my dear one. Calla is far away. You have no use for her now." She pulled him to her, pulled him from the shackles of decaying flesh and browning bone, and she held him in her arms, though he cried and pleaded to be set free, to sleep the dreamless sleep again. She smiled and let him weep. She would be patient, for in time he would learn to accept what she had granted him. Here in the dark, beyond the reach of prayers, she would teach him. All would be well now. All would be well.

"Ah, Carolan," she whispered again. "Did you think I would forget? Did you think I would leave you? I have come to you, Carolan. I have come to find you. And I'll be with you now, my love. I'll be with you now for all eternity. I will be your true and only wife..."

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## FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 26

This skillful mix of cultural traditions is the hallmark of American fantasy. We find it in Karen Joy Fowler's brilliant *Sans Canyon*, set in the Washington Territory of 1873, the story of a Chinese railway worker and a mysterious woman in black. We find it in Midori Snyder's *The Flight of Michael McBride*, her enchanting recent fantasy novel of the American West. Also set in the late 1800s, it is the story of a young Irishman from New York City whose Old World magical traditions collide with the various immigrant and native magics to be found out on the Texas frontier. "What I found interesting in working with so many different cultural expressions of fantasy," writes Snyder from her home in Italy, "was the change in the images from Europe to the U.S., and then from the East Coast cities to the bleached geography of the Southwest. In European stories, the fantastic had faces resembling ours; their houses and tools, their horses, their arts were not so different from those of humans. In cities like New York, the fairies came whole cloth along with the immigrants, moving into tenements and parks, beautiful homes and back alleys. But in the Southwest, where human beings stand dwarfed by the hugeness of the sky, by the vast distances, the fantastic thinned, becoming vaporous like dust devils and mirages. The fantastic took its form entirely out of nature. To live on the Southwest frontier was to live close to both the beauty and the dangerous chaos of nature, and of the fantastic."

"Yet once I probed beneath the differences in the surface images, I discovered that the 'function' of the magical images in the different narratives was the same: to provoke the transformation of a boy into a man and a hero. To this all cultures speak; and whether the faerie ride magic horses (as they do in Irish myths) or have a heart of thorns hidden within a tree trunk (as they do in Mexican-American myths), they give the hero the same challenges. I relished the differences, the richness of expression, whether one found it in European village life or in the huge spaces of the American High Plains."

The basic themes of myth and legend do not change in cultures around the globe, but each land has its distinctive voice, including Turtle Island. The voice of this land is a chorus made up of many disparate voices. It is a song that is always changing as new peoples come, make their home here; as generations live and die here; as their ways become a part of the American folk culture. In the next *Folkroots*, we'll look at the myths and folkways of Native American peoples, as well as the fantasy literature that these myths have inspired. Until then, watch out for La Llorona, hex witches, brauchers, and conjure doctors...and my wily next door neighbor, the unpredictable Señor Coyote. ♦

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## Contributors.

**L**OUISE COOPER HAS BEEN A FULL-time writer since 1977, and has written twenty fantasy novels in the past ten years. Her *Time Master* trilogy—*The Initiate*, *The Outcast*, and *The Master* (Tor Books)—has given rise to both sequel (*Chaos Gate*) and prequel (*Star Ascendant*) trilogies, and her other books include *Mirage*, *The Sleep of Stone*, and the eight-volume *Indigo* series. Cooper draws much of her inspiration from ancient mythology and magical systems. She describes her fictional worlds as having "a very dark edge," and her heroes—a highly ambiguous term in her stories—tend to favor sorcery rather than swords in dealing with their dilemmas! British-born resident of London, Cooper's other loves (apart from writing, of course) are music, gardening, cooking, steam locomotives, watching cricket, and cats of every description.

Margaret Ball lives in Austin, Texas with her husband and two children. She has a B.A. in mathematics and a Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of Texas. Recent publications include *The Shadow Gate* (Baen, 1991), *Flameweaver* (Baen, 1991) and *Changeweaver* (Baen, 1992). Her last book, *No Earthly Sunne*, was released in December 1994. She also plays the flute, makes quilts, and raises children at home in her spare time.

Carolyn Ives Gilman's stories have appeared in magazines and anthologies such as *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Universe*, *Full Spectrum*, and *Interzone*. One of her novelettes was a 1992 Nebula finalist. She works as a museum administrator, and lives in St. Louis, Missouri.

Amy Wolf is a graduate of Clarion West and has published thirty-six stories in the SF/Fantasy/Horror press, including *Interzone*. She is currently at work on a novel set in the period of the Crusades. Amy worked in the film industry for fifteen years, in feature advertising, post-production and development. She now lives in Seattle and is trying to swim her way back to Hollywood.

Daniel Marcus has had recent short fiction in *Asimov's*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and *Science Fiction Age*. He has recently finished his first novel, *A Crack in Everything*.



Carolyn Ives Gilman



Daniel Marcus

He is a graduate of Clarion West '92.

During his fifteen-year freelance career, David Beck's clients have included the NFL, Playboy and McDonald's. His many movie posters include *Under Siege*. He has won many awards from the Society of Illustrators and other organizations. His original canvases are avidly collected: The Grateful Dead own thirteen or more of his pieces.



Margaret Ball



John Moore

**J**OHAN MOORE IS A CHEMICAL ENGINEER who lives and works in Houston, Texas. His short fiction has appeared in *Aboriginal SF*, *Tomorrow*, *Writers of the Future*, *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, and others. His fantasy novel, *Slay and Rescue*, was published by Baen Books.

Web Bryant's artistic skills cross many disciplines in commercial art. The graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University was part of the design team that created *USA Today*. Other achievements: art directing the first national children's newspaper, *Pennywhistle Press*; creating national award-winning maps and graphics; and being commissioned to paint portraits of a Supreme Court justice and corporate CEOs. His first love is painting, especially when he can work with the wonders of natural and directional light.

Gary Freeman has been a SF fan all of his life, starting with Ray Bradbury and Harlan Ellison, but it took seeing Frank Frazetta's covers that led this Las Vegas, Nevada, artist to become a professional in the fields of advertising and publishing. For over fifteen years, his work has appeared in all the major SF magazines.

Jeanne Cavelos is an English professor at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire. She specializes in teaching fiction and nonfiction writing, fantasy literature, popular culture, and publishing. Before becoming a college professor, Jeanne was a senior editor at Dell Publishing, where she launched the highly praised Abyss imprint of sophisticated, psychological horror, for which she won the World Fantasy Award, and the Cutting Edge imprint of literary fiction. Jeanne has published short fiction and nonfiction in several magazines. She has recently started her own freelance editorial business, Jeanne Cavelos Editorial Services. ♦

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